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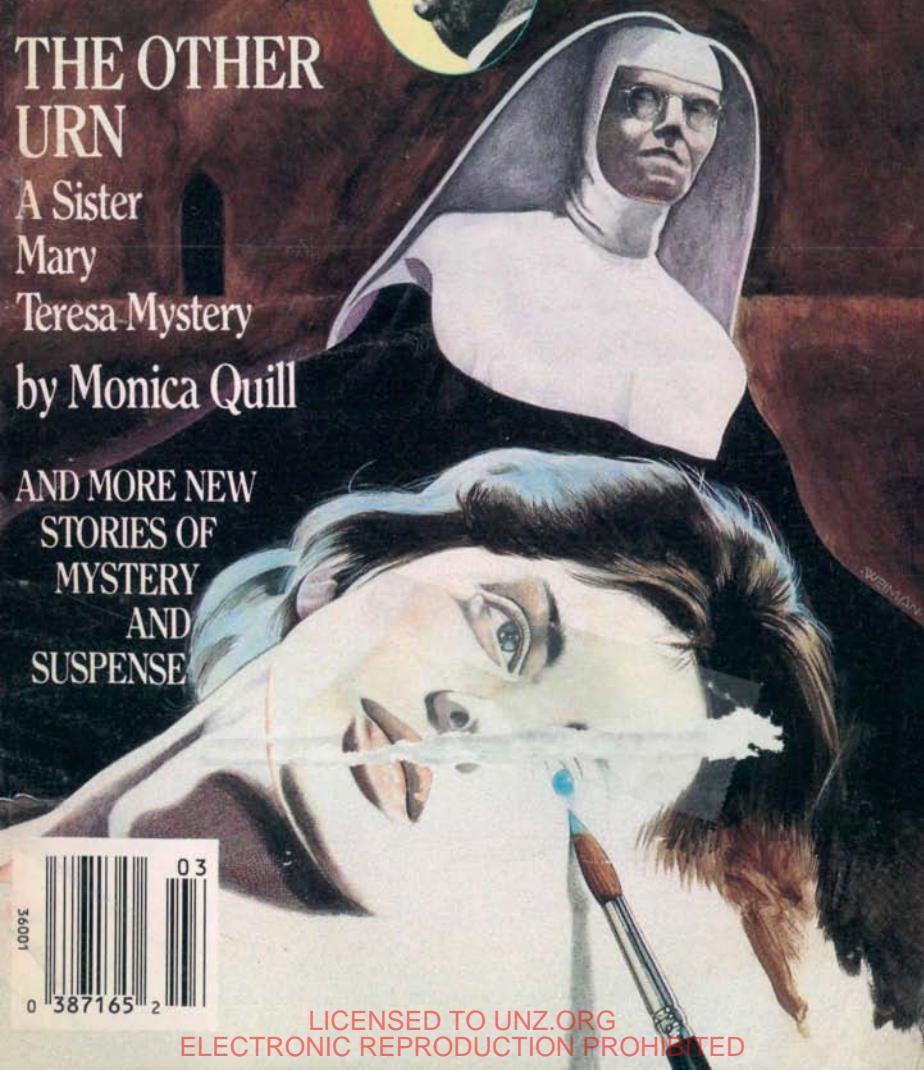
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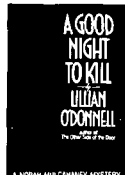
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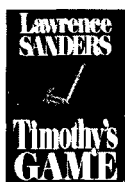
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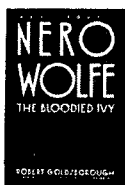
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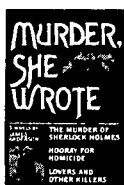
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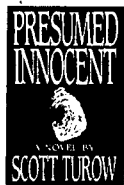
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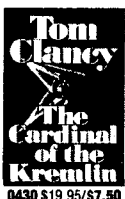
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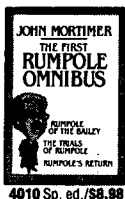
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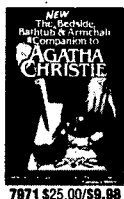
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Some of you may already have noticed that our book column, *Booked & Printed*, bears a new byline. We regret saying farewell to the column's initiator, Mary Cannon, but very much welcome our new reviewer, Carol Harper.

Booked & Printed was instigated almost six years ago, with the August 1982 issue, and Mary Cannon has been faithfully one of us all that time. For several years the Mystery Reviews portion of the column was always preceded by a "profile" of a particular author, always a creator of a series character. We've brought you some fifty such profiles to date, though from early 1986 on they have been limited to about four a year. There's no telling how

many hundreds of reviews, in addition to the profiles, Mary has written over the years, but she's done yeoman service in keeping us all acquainted with new and newly-reprinted books in the field.

About a year and a half ago, however, as we mentioned at the time, Mary opened her own mystery bookstore in Minneapolis, called *Once Upon a Crime*, and since then she's found the day's work doubling and redoubling. (And its satisfactions, she assures us.) And so she's passed her reviewer's cap along to Ms. Harper—with the exception that she will continue to do two columns a year, probably a Christmas one and a summer-vacation-reading one. We're delighted that she'll still

(continued on page 37)

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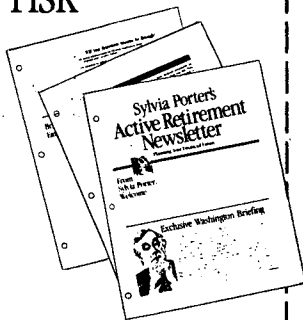
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FICTION

Wooden Indian

by
Bill
Pronzini

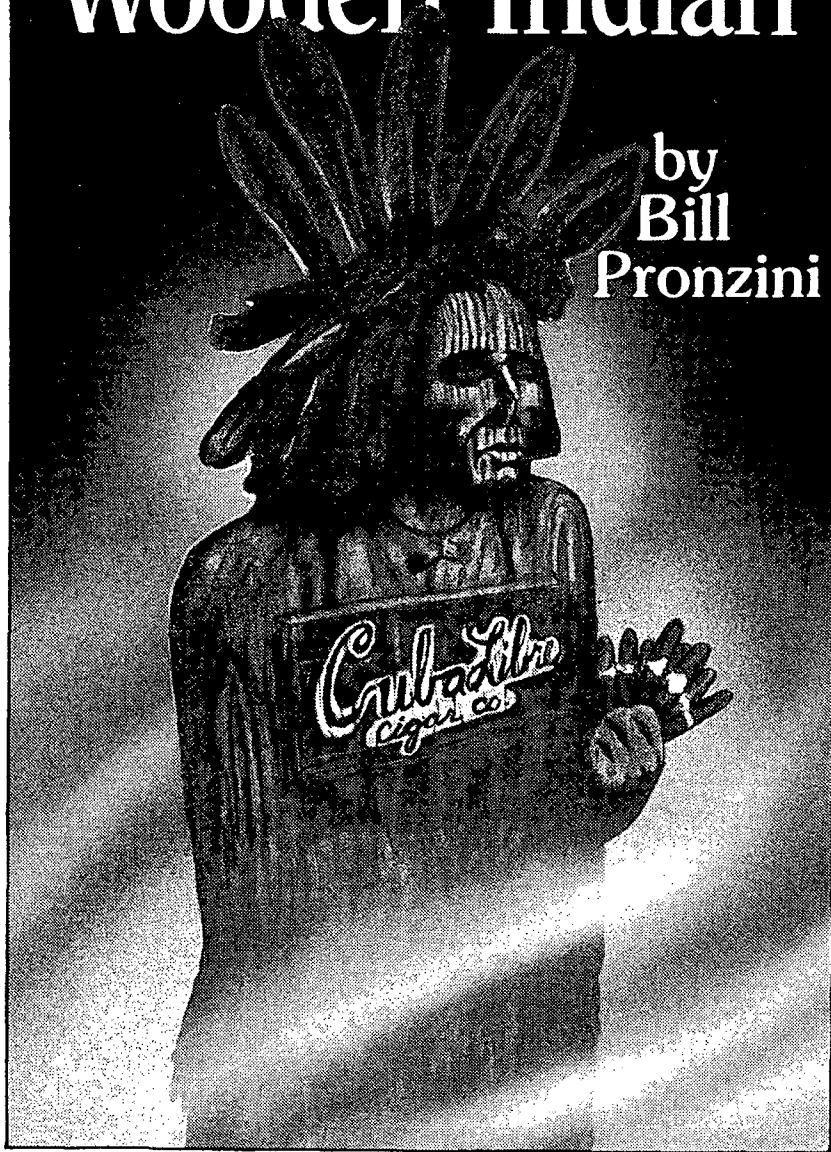


Illustration by Joe Jereda

I was laying a fire in the cast-iron stove when Henry Bandelier, who owns the Elk Basin General Merchandise Store, came rushing into my office. Usually Bandelier is the unflappable sort, but he was in a dither this cold October morning; he was so flappable, in fact, with his feet moving and his arms sawing up and down, he looked like a scrawny pink crow about to take flight.

"Sheriff, I been robbed!"

That brought me right up to attention. I didn't much care for Bandelier—he was a loudmouth, and no more honest than he had to be—but you don't have to care for a man to do your duty by him.

"The hell you say. When did it happen?"

"Middle of the night," he said.

"How much is missing?"

"How much? *All* of it, of course!"

"All the money in your cashbox?"

"Money? Who said anything about money?"

"Well, you did . . . didn't you?"

"No! Wasn't money that was stolen. It was my Indian."

" . . . Come again?"

"You heard me, sheriff. My prize wooden Indian's been pilfered."

"Now who inarnation would steal that monstros—" I stopped, cleared my throat, and started over. "That Indian's been setting out in front of your store six or seven years now. Weighs two hundred pounds if it weighs an ounce. Who'd want to go and steal it?"

"Tom Black Wolf, that's who."

"Oh, now . . ."

"It's a fact," Bandelier said. "You can't go sticking up for that boy this time, Lucas Monk. Him and that cousin of his, Charlie Walks Far, stole my Indian in the dead of night and that's the plain truth."

"How do you know it was them?"

"Lloyd Cooper told me so, that's how I know. He was awake at three A.M., using his chamberpot, and he heard a wagon rattling by the hotel and looked out and it was Tom Black Wolf and Charlie Walks Far making off with my Indian."

"How could Lloyd tell who was on the wagon, at that distance?"

"There was a moon last night," Bandelier said. "You know that as well as I do. A big fat harvest moon. Lloyd saw them plain. Saw something eight feet long in the bed, too, under a piece of canvas. Said it looked like a body. Ain't anything eight feet long that looks

like a covered-up corpse, by God, except my Indian."

That was open to debate, but trying to argue with a fractious Henry Bandelier was like trying to argue with a mean-spirited bull in rutting season. I said, "All right, Mr. Bandelier. You just simmer down. I'll drive out to the reservation and have a talk with Tom Black Wolf."

"Talk with him, hell. You arrest him, sheriff, you hear me? You arrest him and bring back my Indian or I'll know the reason why!" He turned on his heel and stalked out.

I stood puzzling for a time in the cold office. *The reason why.* Well, that was the question uppermost in my mind, even if it wasn't uppermost in Henry Bandelier's.

What would a couple of Indians want with an eight foot, two hundred pound wooden Indian?

The damn Model T wouldn't start without I spent twenty minutes at the crank, aggravating my bursitis with every turn. Contraption never failed to give me trouble as soon as the weather turned frosty. Come the winter snows, I'd lock it in my barn again and leave it there until the thaw. Progress is all well and good, and in 1915 a county sheriff's got to have a modern conveyance or folks don't think he's serious about his job; but if you ask me, a good horse is a better asset to a man than any motor car ever manufactured. Horses don't freeze up in the winter, for one thing. And you don't have to crank one until your arm pretty near falls off to get it started on cold mornings.

I pedaled the flivver into low gear and drove on down Main Street, with the exhaust spitting smoke and sparks all the way. The front of Henry Bandelier's store looked some better without that wooden Indian rearing up next to the entrance. Most folks in Elk Basin would agree with that, too; Bandelier had had more than one complaint about it over the years. But he was right paternal about that Indian, which was ironical because he didn't like real Indians at all; he'd trade with the ones on the reservation but he made them come around to the rear so as not to "offend" his white customers. He claimed the wooden Indian had been a gift from the Cuba Libre Cigar Company of Cleveland, Ohio, in honor of the fact that he sold more Cuba Libre crooks and panatelas than any other merchant in the state. More likely, he'd made some kind of deal with the Cuba Libre people to display that Indian, which had their name written across the chest in bold red letters, in exchange for

a fatter discount. Either way, it was an eyesore. And not just on account of its size. It was rough-carved of some tobacco-spit brown wood, the limbs and head were all out of proportion to the body, a piece of the nose had been shot off by a drunken cowboy one Fourth of July, and the "cigars" it was clutching were so big and phallic-looking they'd caused more than one woman to blush when Bandelier first unveiled it.

Officially, though, that wooden Indian might have been the Mona Lisa: it was stolen property, its theft a felony offense. The law's the law and I'm sworn to uphold it. But it sure would pain me to have to arrest Tom Black Wolf and Charlie Walks Far for the crime. Especially young Tom.

He was twenty-two, smart as a whip, and down-deep honest. You could trust him with your money and likely your life, which is a hell of a lot more than I'd say for most white men in Elk Basin. He'd whizzed through agency school, and at the urging of Abe Fetters, the Indian agent, and Doc Cranston and me and a couple of others, he'd come in to attend high school right here in town. Graduated at the top of his class, too. He wanted to be an agronomist. I had to go look that up. It means somebody who specializes in field-crop production and soil management, which is to say somebody who can make crops grow on poor land. He'd applied to the state university and been accepted and would have enrolled last semester—he'd been working two jobs off the reservation to save up enough for his tuition—except that his grandfather, old Chief Victor, had taken mortal sick. Tom idolized Chief Victor, who had once been a great warrior and who was descended from and named after the head chief of the Flatheads during the middle of the last century; and he just wouldn't leave the reservation while the old man was on his deathbed. Well, Chief Victor had been on his deathbed three months now and was likely to lie there another three before he finally let go. Those old warriors die hard.

So that was Tom Black Wolf. And Charlie Walks Far was all right, too. Not as bright as Tom, but a hard worker and no trouble to anybody. It just didn't make sense that those two, of all the people in the county, red or white, would have swiped Bandelier's damned cigar company Indian. Not even as a prank; they were too sober-sided for that sort of foolishness.

It was a dozen miles out to the reservation, along a road that had been built for wagons, not Model T Fords. The motor car was contrary at the best of times; on such a road as this it kept bucking

and lurching as if it didn't like my company or my hands on its steering wheel. By the time I drove onto reservation land, my backside was sorer than if I'd been sitting a saddle twenty-four hours straight.

The reservation was poor land, rocky and hilly, with almost no decent bottomland. No wonder Tom Black Wolf wanted to be an agronomist; you'd have to have special training, and maybe divine help, to grow worthwhile crops in soil like this. That was the federal government for you: force the Indians onto such land and then expect them to lick your boots in gratitude just because the land was free. It was a hell of a thing to be born with a skin color different from the men who ran the country, particularly when the country had been yours in the first place.

Close to five hundred Indians lived there—Flatheads, mostly, with a few Piegans and Bloods. Their homes were slab-built shacks put up by the government back in the seventies, most of them scattered around a small, shallow lake. There were some ramshackle barns and livestock pens—the Indians ran sheep, goats, and a few head of cattle—and an agency store and an infirmary where the poorly trained reservation doctor treated ills and disease with such medicines as the Bureau of Indian Affairs doled out. Tweaked my conscience every time I came out here, even though I'd had nothing to do with building the place or with running it. It was squalor, plain and simple, two generations' worth, and no man worth his salt faces squalor with a clear conscience.

A dirt road rimmed the lake, and the flivver made so much noise rattling along it that kids and dogs ran and hid. When I came up to Chief Victor's house—bigger than most, as befitted his station—Tom Black Wolf appeared in the doorway. He watched me shut the motor down and climb off and walk on over to him. Usually he had a smile for me, but today he was all Indian; there wasn't any more expression on his lean face or in his eyes than there was in Henry Bandelier's wooden Indian.

I didn't smile either. I said, "Morning, Tom. Taste of snow in the air, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes. Have you come to see me, Sheriff Lucas?"

"Some questions I'd like to ask you. I don't want to disturb your grandfather, though. We can talk out here."

"Chief Victor has been moved to the infirmary. The doctor requested it two days ago."

"He's bad off, then?"

"Yes. It is almost his time."

"I'm sorry, Tom."

"You shouldn't be," he said. "It is only a passage. Chief Victor has led a long and honorable life and he will find his reward." I nodded, and Tom said then, formal, "Please come inside where it's warm."

We went in. Tom kept the place clean, and mostly neat except for books. He was a reader; Tom was—read anything and everything, on just about any subject you could name. Hungry for knowledge, that was Tom Black Wolf. There were books on the wood-block tables and chairs and scattered in piles over the painted board floor. Some were his, that he'd bought through mail-order; others belonged to the new Elk Basin Library. Miss Mary Ellen Belknap, the librarian and town historian, let him check out as many as he wanted, despite the few good citizens who frowned on such generosity.

I went over and stood by the stove, to thaw myself out. Tom let me warm some before he said, "You have questions, you said?"

"It's a law matter. Seems that wooden Indian sets out in front of Henry Bandelier's store was stolen last night. He thinks you and Charlie Walks Far did the deed."

Tom didn't say anything.

"Did you, son? You and Charlie?"

He just looked at me with his face set and his lips pressed tight together. That gave me another twinge, for it told me he was guilty, all right, and that he wasn't going to own up to it. An Indian who respects you—and I knew Tom respected me—won't lie to your face, the way a white man will. Instead he keeps his mouth shut and lets you think whatever you like.

"Tom," I said, "stealing's a serious crime, you know that. Even if it is of a public eyesore. If you've got that wooden Indian around here somewhere, I'll find it. Go easier on you and Charlie if you tell me where it is and your reason for making off with it."

"You're welcome to search, Sheriff Lucas."

"Is that all you got to say?"

He nodded. Once.

"All right, then," I said. "I'll just go ahead and see what's what."

Which I did, and of course I didn't find any sign of that eight foot hunk of wood. Finding it wasn't going to be *that* easy. When I was done I walked to the door and started out, and then stopped and turned and said, "You been doing some saw work this morning, Tom?"

It didn't faze him. Takes a better white man than me to surprise

an Indian, I guess. He said, bland as you please, "Saw work?"

"Got sawdust all over your shoes." He did, too; I'd noticed it while I was warming up at the stove. "Don't look like cottonwood or jackpine or any other wood grows around here. Matter of fact, it looks like that tobacco-spit brown wood Henry Bandelier's statue is carved out of."

Tom didn't say anything.

"Cut it up for firewood, did you?"

Silence.

"Or maybe it offended you boys somehow. That it?"

Silence.

I sighed, though not so's he could hear me do it, and said, "Reckon I'll be back, Tom," and went on out to the flivver.

I found Charlie Walks Far tending sheep on the hardscrabble land north of the lake. I had to leave the Ford on the road; if I'd tried to drive up to where Charlie was, I'd have busted an axle or bruised my liver or both. But I was just wasting my time. Charlie was as close-mouthed as Tom. No lies, no admissions; just civility and nothing more.

So then I went to see Abe Fetters, the Indian agent who also ran the reservation store. He didn't know anything about the wooden Indian—not that I expected him to—and said he just couldn't believe Tom Black Wolf and Charlie Walks Far would resort to common thievery.

"Particularly not now," Abe went on, "with Chief Victor so sick. Why, it'd be an act of disrespect, and you know how Tom idolizes his grandfather."

"Maybe they had a good reason for it," I said.

"They may have thought so. But what?"

"Well, I don't know. Some ceremonial reason, maybe?"

Abe laughed without much humor. "Take my word for it," he said, "there's no Flathead ceremony involving a wooden Indian."

I asked him to help me comb the village and see what we could find. He said he would. And we did. And that was another big waste of time. Whatever Tom and Charlie had done with the statue, it was well hidden—or its remains were. We didn't find even a speck of sawdust to match the kind on Tom's shoes.

We stopped finally at the infirmary, for I thought it proper to pay my respects—likely my last respects—to Chief Victor. But the old man was asleep and the halfbreed doctor, Joshua Teel, wouldn't let me in to see him. Chief Victor likely wouldn't recognize me

anyway, Teel said; the old warrior was mostly delirious now and had been for a couple of days.

So it was a morning of frustrations all around.

Wasn't anything for me to do then but drive on back to Elk Basin. It was well past noon by that time, and I was almost as hungry as I was puzzled. None of it made a lick of sense. Hell, if anything the theft made less sense now than it had before I'd visited the reservation.

Why would two basically honest young Indians steal a worthless wooden Indian? And why in tarnation would they take a saw to it once they had it?

Back in town I put the Model T away in the City Hall barn and then went and hunted up Lloyd Cooper and had a little talk with him. After which I took my sore bones to the Elite Café for a late lunch. But before I could eat it, Henry Bandelier came prancing in; he'd seen me drive through earlier and he'd also seen that I was alone—no Tom Black Wolf, no Charlie Walks Far, and no wooden Indian.

"Well?" he demanded, after he'd sat down uninvited at my table. "Why didn't you arrest those two bucks?"

"I didn't arrest 'em," I said, "on account of I got no evidence they're the guilty parties."

"No evidence? Hogwash! I told you Lloyd Cooper saw them stealing my Indian in the middle of the night."

"That's not exactly what Lloyd saw. I just talked to him myself a few minutes ago. He saw Tom and Charlie, all right, on board a wagon with something in the bed under a piece of canvas, but he didn't see what that something was. Not so much as a glimpse of it."

"It was my Indian. You know it was!"

"I don't know any such thing," I said. "I didn't find that statue of yours out at the reservation, nor anybody who knew anything about it."

Bandelier shaped his lips like a man about to spit. "Just how carefully did you search, sheriff?"

"Carefully enough." I fixed him with a hard eye. "And I don't like your tone, Mr. Bandelier. You implying that I haven't done my duty?"

"If the shoe fits," he said, prissy.

"Well, it don't fit," I said. "Now suppose you take yourself back

behind your store counter and let me eat my lunch in peace and quiet."

"I'm warning you, Sheriff Monk . . ."

"You're doing what?"

He didn't like what he saw in my face. He scraped back his chair, not meeting my eyes now, and said to my left shoulder, "If you won't do anything about those two thieving Flatheads, then I will."

"Such as?"

"That's my business."

"Not if it involves breaking the law. You do anything illegal, like going out to the reservation yourself with mischief in mind, and I'll cloud up and rain all over you. And you can damned well count on that."

I spoke loud, so that the five other citizens in the Elite could also hear my words plain. Bandelier's face got even redder than it already was. But he had enough sense not to sling any more words of his own; he put his back to me and walked out all stiff and righteous, like a sinner leaving a tent meeting.

Well, hell, I thought.

Now I'd lost my appetite.

Henry Bandelier was born without the sense God gave a picket-pin gopher: he tried to stir up trouble in spite of my warning. He talked long and fast to anybody who'd listen about the "red heathens out on the reservation," and what lowdown thieves they were, and even though it had been years since we'd had any problems to speak of with the Indians, there were some hotheads who believed him. There'd have been an incident come out of it, too, with white men and red both getting hurt, if I hadn't got wind of a midnight meeting in the back of Bandelier's store. Half a dozen men were there, armed with axe handles and fortified with free liquor, and they were getting ready to ride on out to the reservation to "teach those Indians a lesson," as Bandelier was saying when I busted in.

I chased the others home and threw Bandelier in jail on a charge of inciting to riot. He squawked long and loud, which was fine with me; he also made some thinly veiled threats, which wasn't fine with me. So I added "threatening a peace officer with bodily harm" to the charges against him.

In the morning Bandelier demanded his lawyer. When Jack Dunlap showed up I talked to him first, after which he consulted with

Bandelier in private for the better part of an hour. What he said must have put the fear of God into the storekeeper; Bandelier was some subdued when we all went trooping over to see Judge Cooney. The judge let Bandelier out on bail, and I promised to reduce the charges against him on the proviso that he quit trying to provoke conflict with the Indians and leave the matter of the missing statue in the hands of the law.

That put an end to the trouble. Bandelier had too much self-esteem to suffer a public disgrace lightly; he retreated into his store and his humiliation, and from then on kept his big mouth shut.

I continued to investigate the theft, off and on for two days, but there just wasn't anything to find out. I was considering another drive out to the reservation when Abe Fetters showed up in town with the news that Chief Victor had died.

I talked to Abe over at the train depot where he was picking up a consignment of supplies from the government. He said the old man had passed on two nights ago, in his sleep. Yesterday there'd been the usual tribal ceremony presided over by the medicine man. Today, though, there'd been something that *wasn't* usual.

"What's that, Abe?" I asked.

"Well, the burial," he said. "They took his remains out to the burial ground before dawn without telling the medicine man. Or me, for that matter. I didn't find out until after it was already done."

"Who did?"

"Tom Black Wolf and members of his family. Funny breach of custom. First time anything like it has happened."

"Tom give you an explanation?"

"No," Abe said. "I asked him and so did the medicine man, but he wouldn't say. He must have had a good reason, though. Indians don't do anything without a good reason."

"You got any idea what it might be?"

"Not a one."

Neither did I, right then.

But I sure did that evening.

The official part of my day ends at six o'clock when my night deputy, Gus Beemis, comes on. Since I lost my wife Tess two years ago, my evenings tend to be pretty quiet and of a sameness. Usually I have supper at the Elite Café, go on home, do such chores as need

doing, turn in, and read myself to sleep. Gets lonely sometimes, especially around the holidays, but a man learns to live with that, same as he learns to live with all the other things, good and bad, that make up his life.

Some evenings after supper I stop by the library before I head home, to pick up and return books. In my early days I wasn't much of a reader; but after Tess passed on I took it up on a regular basis, just as Tom Black Wolf had, and found that I'd been short-changing myself most of my life. Books are more than just tools of knowledge; good books are friends. Better friends, some of them, than the human variety.

This was one of my nights to stop by the library. And I chanced to walk in while Mary Ellen Belknap was having a conversation with Lydia Cranston, Doc Cranston's wife. Indians was what they were talking about—Chief Victor's passing, at first. The library is small, so I couldn't have helped overhearing them if I'd wanted to. And I didn't want to when their talk shifted to Tom Black Wolf.

"I swan," Mary Ellen said, "I'll never understand Indians."

"Why do you say that?" Lydia asked.

"Well, you take Tom Black Wolf. He's always been such a good boy. Smart, well-mannered, and respectful of property. That's why I've let him check out books since he was in high school; he never abused the privilege. But now . . . well, I hope he isn't going to start running wild."

"Why would you think he'd start running wild, for heaven's sake?"

"It's the little things, isn't it?" Mary Ellen said. "That's how it always starts. And now that Chief Victor is gone, the authority figure in Tom's life—"

"What little things?"

"The last batch of books he checked out were overdue for almost two weeks. He's never had overdue books before."

"Well, my land, with his grandfather so sick—"

"That's not all," Mary Ellen said. "He also mutilated a book."

"He did what?"

"Mutilated a book. Don't look at me that way, Lydia, it's true. He tore a photograph out of an expensive history book. Oh, he pasted it back in but you can see plainly where it was ripped out—"

I was over at the desk by then. I said, "Mary Ellen, when did you find out about this torn photograph?"

She blinked at me. She's six feet tall and horse-faced and when

she blinks she looks like a startled mare. "Why . . . just this afternoon, sheriff. Tom brought in the books that were overdue. One was the history text—"

"You have that book handy?"

"Yes, it's on my desk."

"Mind letting me see it?"

"Of course not, but what—"

"Just let me see the book, Mary Ellen."

She got it for me. The title and subtitle were stamped in gilt on the front cover: *Sons and Daughters of the Nile: A History of Egypt from Ancient to Modern Times*. I opened it up and found the photograph that had been torn out and pasted back in, and took a good long look at it, and that was when I got my notion. The damndest notion I'd ever had, but there it was.

I said to Mary Ellen, "I'd like to borrow this book until tomorrow."

"Check it out, you mean? But it needs to be properly repaired—"

"Just until tomorrow, Mary Ellen."

Before she could say anything else I tucked the book under my arm and went on out. I could feel the two women's eyes on my back, and I could hear them start to whisper even before I shut the door.

When I got home I sat in my Morris chair and did some studying on the history book. Then I did some studying without the book, working that notion of mine from different angles. And by golly, all the pieces fit together as pretty as you please:

The missing wooden Indian . . . the sawdust on Tom's shoes the morning after the theft . . . Chief Victor's illness and delirium . . . Tom and his family not letting either the tribal medicine man or Abe Fetters come along to the burial grounds . . . and the torn-out photograph in the Egyptian history book—the photograph of a sarcophagus, one of those stone coffins made in the likeness of the kings and queens and other royalty that were buried inside them.

Suppose Tom and Charlie Walks Far hadn't cut that wooden Indian into pieces; suppose they'd sawed it clean in half, lengthwise, and then hollowed out both halves with hammers and wood chisels. And suppose they'd put Chief Victor's remains inside and buried one Indian with the other.

Chief Victor himself would have had to ask for it. And he might have, even if it went smack against tribal custom, if he'd been addled enough in his sickness. Could be he'd got hold of the Egyp-

tian history book—Tom always had books lying around their shack—and could be he'd seen that photograph of the sarcophagus, and torn it out because it fascinated him, and in his delirium determined that he was royalty, too, descended from the Great Chief Victor, so why shouldn't he have a coffin like the Egyptian royalty did? Tom wouldn't have refused anything his grandfather asked, no matter how daft or heretical; he'd likely have tried to argue against it but in the end he wouldn't have refused. And since there was no time to build a sarcophagus in the old warrior's true likeness, with Chief Victor already knocking at death's door, Tom and Charlie Walks Far had had to make do with what came easy to hand.

But, hell, it was a crazy notion. Pure foolishness, even if all the pieces did fit. Must be some other explanation that made better and saner sense.

And yet . . .

Well, I *could* tell Abe Fетters about it and we *could* go out to the reservation burial ground and find out for certain. But that struck me as downright sacrilegious. Those poor Indians had enough trials and tribulations without a bunch of white men digging up their sacred burial ground. Besides which, if it did turn out to be true, then the citizens of Elk Basin would have a field day at the Indians' expense and the whole thing would get written up in newspapers around the state and maybe around the country, too. And as if that wasn't bad enough, I'd have to arrest Tom and Charlie, and Henry Bandelier would sure as hell press charges against them. There'd be no justice in that. Tom couldn't go to the university and become an agronomist and help his people if he was serving a stretch in the state penitentiary.

No, I decided, the best thing for me to do was to keep that crazy notion of mine to myself. Better yet, dismiss it as a pipe dream and forget all about it.

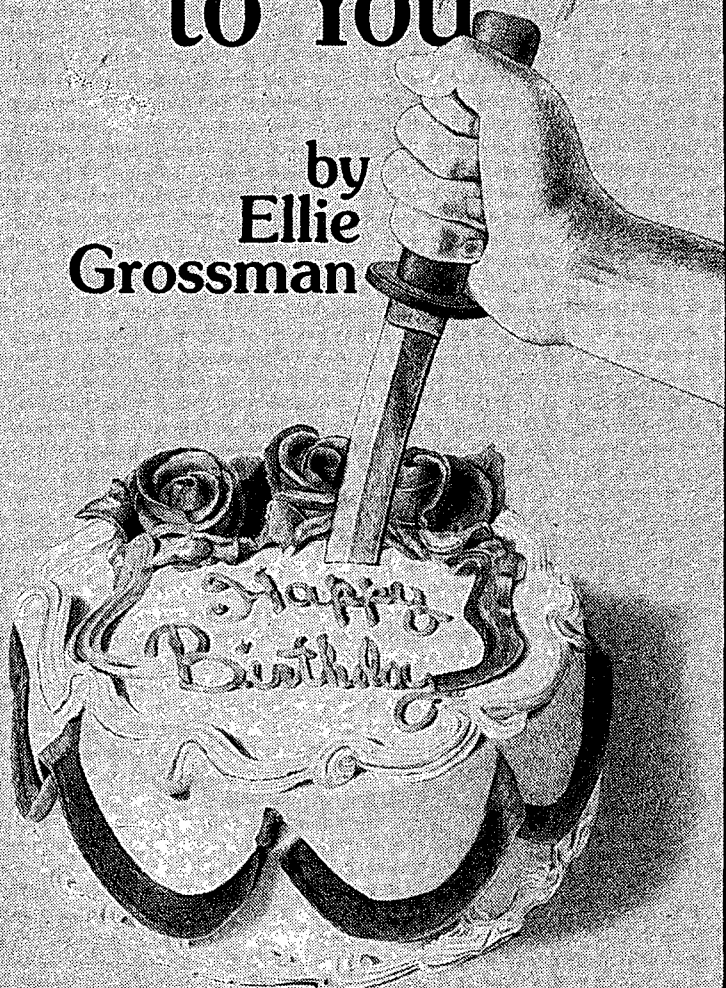
That's just what I did. And to this day nobody in Elk Basin has ever found out what really happened to Henry Bandelier's wooden Indian. Including me.

Some things, I reckon, folks are just better off not knowing.

FICTION

“... Birthday to You”

by
Ellie
Grossman



Bethesda di Santangelo. That's how Justine liked to think of herself. Bethesda di Santangelo. A stylish, artistic young woman whom people would notice hurrying through the park on her way to some important appointment. With her publisher. Or the curator of the Metropolitan about an exhibition of her work, the kind that called for huge, positively humongous, banners above the entrance that could be seen all the way from First Avenue. From beyond that, even. From across the East River. From whatever was *beyond* the East River. They'd see them from there. Purple banners, with Di Santangelo in bright yellow letters.

Or, Justine thought, swaying lightly as the 79th Street bus took the curve under the first overpass on the transverse and the park slipped briefly from view, she'd be on her way to interview someone on Fifth Avenue. An interview with . . . Woody Allen. Yes! He lived on Fifth Avenue. In fact, his building, she had read, was directly across from the San Remo on Central Park West.

That pleased Justine enormously, since she lived just a few buildings up from the San Remo. Naturally, by the time she interviewed Woody, she'd be living *in* the San Remo. Atop it, actually. Hers would be a suite of rooms in the uppermost reaches of one of the twin towers. She would, in fact, occupy both towers, thus enabling her to work the enormous beacon lights that illuminated them at night. *Her* towers, then, would blink on and off across the park in a special way that only Woody—and Mia, if she were present—would understand. Provided they were looking out the window at the time, of course.

The bus had crossed the park and was now making its first stop just east of Fifth Avenue. Although more passengers got off than entered, there were still no empty seats. Not that it would have made a difference. Justine still would have stood. She was content to. It was what her parents expected. She was young and healthy. There was no reason she shouldn't stand. She was to be grateful she could, since so many others weren't that fortunate.

Justine shifted the books in her arms, freeing a hand, and edged her glasses higher on the bridge of her nose. Her arms were growing tired. The books were becoming quite a weight. But, she told herself firmly, watching a youngish man in a business suit lowering himself into a vacated seat, they weren't required school texts; it was no one's fault but her own if they were a burden.

She hitched them to one side to ease the weight—and also in the hope that the movement would draw the eye of the important

woman seated before her. Justine wanted the woman to be impressed with the titles. She, the woman, was concentrating on the business section of the *Times*. It partly obscured an expensive leather attaché case in her lap.

But she took no notice of Justine or the books.

When she was younger, Justine would have felt some sense of injury or slight. Some resentment. Now, she knew better. She adjusted her glasses and lifted her chin and tried to concentrate on the bus card in the advertising panel above the window. It was a poem. From the Metropolitan Transit Authority. And someone named Crane Lasky. Justine didn't actually understand what it was about—she hadn't the patience for poetry—still, she tried hard to achieve an expression that indicated she was quite moved.

After all, one of her books was *The Prophet*. Justine had heard Arlene Golden mention it to Cindy Capasso between classes. They both excelled in English, and that afternoon, after school, Justine had bought a copy. It was so pale and slim (and Arlene had said it was just so beautiful) that Justine enjoyed carrying it around with her. Eventually, she added *The Challenge of Human Relationships* and *Loving Each Other*, both by Leo Buscaglia, also personally recommended. And a number of others.

At first she only took them to school, where she left them in her locker until third period. English. Then, she would place the books on her desk so Mr. Herman could see them and truly and deeply notice how sensitive . . . and happy! . . . she was, which hadn't happened as yet but was certain to.

On Tuesdays, finding herself reluctant to leave them in her locker overnight, she began taking them along to her piano lessons, which Justine so enjoyed except when Miss Lucher corrected her fingering, which she seemed always to be doing, rather impatiently. At first Justine had frowned and nudged her glasses. But in time she'd learned to continue smiling, bearing in mind that music was a wonderful thing that gave people joy, just as her mother said, and that it was unreasonable to become upset about things that made people happy.

Eventually, Justine even carried the books to Sunday school, but more from the comforting habit of holding them to her chest when she was waiting for the bus than anything else because, once there, she became so engrossed in how the Kingdom of God made people happy, forever and ever, and what heaven was like that she forgot all about the books and sat there staring above the blackboard at

the large painting of clouds and blue sky and angels that hovered by a shaft of God's light that shone directly at her. It was the entrance to heaven, and so vivid and inviting was it that sometimes Justine felt she could drift right up into the painting, into the light, into the most blessed existence she could ever imagine.

Perhaps, she mused, her own face would then appear in the painting, eyes closed, a peaceful smile on her lips, her expression attesting to sublime love and contentment. Justine always found it odd that the painter hadn't included a face or two—a saint, if not the Lord himself. Perhaps he meant to but couldn't find the right models. Or hadn't had time. But then, altered, the painting might not be the mesmerizing work of art it was, mightn't it?

When the bus stopped at Lexington Avenue, Justine got off, making sure to tell the driver goodbye and wish him a good day. He ignored her, but one didn't do what one did in order to be appreciated, she told herself.

The sky was overcast and there was no sign of a Lexington Avenue bus, so Justine began walking. It was just as well. She could glance into shop windows on the way on the chance of finding something suitable. Something totally appropriate.

Of course, as she walked, radiating warmth and good spirits to other pedestrians, she saw nothing of the kind. She hadn't really expected to. These shops tried hard, but Justine couldn't think of one important woman who talked about buying something in a divine store on Lexington between 60th and 80th. Not one. They *always* went to Bloomie's (oh, the sound of it!) and sometimes Bendel's or Bonwit's. Well, not Bonwit's so much. Actually, only Joan Rivers ever mentioned Bonwit's, and Justine didn't like Joan Rivers because the things she said about people were mean and hurtful, even though she was always saying it was just a joke. But how would Joan Rivers feel if people on television called her "fox-face" and "skinny mirink"?

But thinking of Joan Rivers was making Justine tense and uncomfortable, and so she forced her features into a smile and strode along, inclining her head as Queen Elizabeth might do, or a hostess in a coffee shop, intent on cleansing herself of negative thoughts. Her father often said people wasted entire lifetimes on negative emotions.

Not him and her mother, of course. Not Sid and Clarissa. They were the most vital, vibrant, life-affirming people in the world. They were always trying new experiences. They were determined

to do and see everything, which was the only way to live, they said. Why take up space on the planet, if you were just going to stand around "complaining and wasting time"?

Justine agreed totally and looked forward to the day she would experience things, too; when she would be married, when she would be a couple. She tried terribly hard to feel fulfilled and invigorated now, but it was difficult to do that on your own when you were only fifteen. So Justine had come to the belief that what she was experiencing now, what she'd been going through for all these years, was merely preparation. A preface. Life would truly begin after she had metamorphosed into Bethesda di Santangelo, which she expected to do upon graduation from college, if not sooner. Then she would enter life wholeheartedly. She'd be able to, then. By then she would have found her special ally in life, as her own mother had, and she would devote herself to him—and he to her—unstintingly, as couples did.

As she neared 65th Street, Justine deliberately slowed her pace, for pleasure delayed was pleasure divine—and her pleasure was mounting for, there!, already she was able to glimpse Bloomingdale's. She felt a surge of anticipation and pictured herself going through the revolving door, into the glitter of glass counters and discreet lighting and special displays, all theatrically underscored by the black and white checkered floor, the reflecting black and bronze ceiling, the mirrored walls. There was no question about it: Bloomingdale's main floor, and the street level leading up to it, were . . . Broadway!

Which made the floors above, alas, dully provincial. Justine always suffered a letdown riding up on the escalator.

Until, that is, she reached the sixth floor. The Main Course. Oh! the pun of it! Everything so entertaining. Everything *for* entertaining. It was here, Justine was certain—amid the boutiques of ceramics, espresso makers, candlesticks, table linen, potpourri, silver and glass; here amid the festive array of Nixon showerheads and ice cube trays that produced tiny frozen teddy bears to tinkle in your glass—that she would find a gift totally unique and divine. Something that was perfectly suited for Sid and Clarissa's birthdays, which happened to fall on the same date, only three years apart.

Her parents were so well matched, Justine believed that it was more than coincidence: Fate had surely planned for them to be born on the same day. And while Justine knew—indeed, they re-

peatedly told her so—how exceedingly rare it was, she nevertheless prayed that she and her own ally would at least share the same month. Surely, that wasn't impossible. And it would almost be the same, wouldn't it?, a sign that they were destined to make each other happy forever?

Last year for their birthday, Justine had bought Sid and Clarissa each a new passport folder in lizard skin embossed with their initials. She had studied the gift wraps soberly and finally selected gold paper with a wide band of gold ribbon and a tinsel bow of silver and gold. It was very sophisticated, the woman at the wrapping desk assured her. Very good taste. You could rely on Bloomingdale's for that.

It was Justine's intention to place the gifts by Sid and Clarissa's breakfast settings the morning they were to leave for the Orient—they would be celebrating their birthday abroad—but unaccountably, Justine overslept, and they were gone by the time she awoke.

They left a loving note, pledging to call as soon as they arrived. Justine read it twice, folded it in quarters, brought it briefly to her lips; and then placed it in the trash.

Sid and Clarissa were scheduled to return the day before Justine's piano recital but—Justine nudged her glasses up—an airline mechanics' strike delayed them. "Oh, darling, we're so, so, so very sorry!" Her mother had sounded so near that, for an instant, Justine suspected they hadn't gone abroad at all; they were actually nestled at one of their local retreats. The Griswold Inn, perhaps.

Which would explain, she'd thought sharply, why Clarissa kept on apologizing so.

Immediately, however, Justine was overcome with remorse—to *think* such things of them!—and she broke into impassioned protests. *She* was the one to apologize. It was *her* fault they'd gone off without their presents, wasn't it? It wasn't *their* fault they couldn't get home on time. And what did her little recital matter anyway? There was always next year.

Happy birthday, she said.

Afterwards Justine had wandered into their bedroom and sprawled across their bed, turning her face into the coverlet, inhaling the scent of her mother's perfume. Then she had turned on her back and remained like that, staring at the ceiling, thinking of heaven.

Her parents brought back several gifts for her. A peach silk kimono embroidered with cranes, a symbol of longevity. Two ex-

quisite Kabuki dolls made of washi paper. A pair of black lacquer chopsticks inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

And they had brought things for themselves as well. Some Ukiyo prints—Clarissa loved art. And a matched pair of samurai swords, one long, one short, sheathed in scabbards of carved red lacquer. Her father had taken such care placing them in the den on their special pedestal. "It's called the katana kake, Justine."

He had placed it—the katana kake—on the mahogany side table against the wall displaying the grouping of family photos that chronicled his courtship of Clarissa, their marriage and honeymoon, their trips to Europe and South America.

Countless times since, Justine had watched Sid take up the swords to handle them, to slip them in and out of their scabbards. "They used the long one for combat," he'd explain, "and the short one, this one, for seppuku, popularly known as hara-kiri. To disembowel themselves when they had lost their honor.

"Impeccable craftsmen," he would murmur. "Look at how they're fashioned. Look at that. You don't find that kind of excellence any more." And Justine would watch him cautiously caress the blades, back and forth, back and forth.

She was crossing 60th Street, only steps from the entrance to Bloomingdale's, when she became aware of a peculiar air about the building this day, something unpleasantly disquieting. There wasn't much pedestrian traffic going in and out, although that wasn't unusual this time of day. . . .

She caught her breath.

There wasn't *any* pedestrian traffic.

The store was closed.

"For inventory," signs in the windows said.

A man walking in Justine's direction hesitated and seemed about to ask if she needed assistance, then moved on. Two women eyed her obliquely.

Justine was oblivious. She was struggling to make sense of things: that Bloomingdale's should be closed today! Without warning! Leaving her no alternative but to go home, empty-handed, with nothing for Sid and Clarissa on this special day of days. Leaving *them* inevitably to conclude that she didn't love them. Didn't care. When in truth they were all that mattered to her.

But, puzzle over it as she might, in the end there was only one responsible, honorable course open to her. And so, heavy-hearted, she took a step. Then another. And another.

It was measure enough of her character that she was willing to

face them in all her shame; nothing said she had to rush into it.

She would walk home, then.

And she would take the long route, across 59th Street, then up Central Park West.

She used to enjoy walking beside the low stone wall that held in the park, the luxury hotels and apartment houses of Central Park South rising on her left, the only obstruction on the horizon before her the low, squat Coliseum. But, recently, an obscenity she was still unable to accustom herself to had sprouted behind the Coliseum, a hideous growth that was penetrating high into the sky, intruding upon it, violating it.

With a malevolence she simply couldn't conceal, Justine stared at the tower and the gray clouds rearranging themselves around its peak. And as she advanced, all at once, in a moment filled with magic and mystery, there appeared in the sky before her a shaft of light. It blazed for no more than a second, then withdrew into grayness again.

But there was no need for more light.

Justine, transfixed, had understood. She smiled and drew a breath and ever so quietly whispered, "Thank you. Oh, thank you!" For she knew now what her gift would be, and it was a gift to surpass all others. A gift so prodigious that it would prove without question how much she cherished them both.

Her smile became radiant. Her footsteps quickened.

Justine bumped her glasses up, applied measured pressure to the key in the lock, and let herself in very quietly. From the sound of it, it was immediately clear that her mother was on the phone in the kitchen, her father in their bedroom, listening to Mozart.

Giddy and lightheaded, she silently placed her books on the table in the foyer—stealth was unexpectedly exhilarating—and without stopping to discard her jacket, moved silently through the living room and into the den.

In a moment, she was out again, her hands clasped behind her back, her fingers moving caressingly. Smiling mischievously, she retraced her steps across the living room—not a sound, not a breath—and on to the kitchen.

She stood at the door.

Her mother was at the counter, dicing vegetables, her back to Justine, the phone cradled on her shoulder.

Justine edged her glasses up and moved forward.

So swiftly, then, with such force did she raise her arm and bring it down that Clarissa fell with no sound at all, save a small, weak gasp of surprise.

Breathing hard, her eyes wide, Justine cautiously crossed the living room once again, to Sid and Clarissa's bedroom.

The door was shut.

It was possible her father was not napping. Was, perhaps, lying on the bed reading. Would, then, look up as the door opened and see her enter, ruining the surprise.

Carefully, she turned the knob and eased the door ajar, her breath so rapid now it was as if there were bellows inside her chest.

She peered around the door—and smiled.

Her father, indeed, was *not* napping. He was seated at his desk, scribbling on a pad, facing the wall. Mozart had given way to Sibelius, and he was humming along.

Without undue care, then, Justine was able to walk right in.

In the long moment that passed while she gave him his gift—how odd that he should swivel like that and clutch at her and cast such a *look!*—in that protracted moment, Justine saw vividly the clouds and the angels, and the loving shaft of light shining down on her, bright and beneficent.

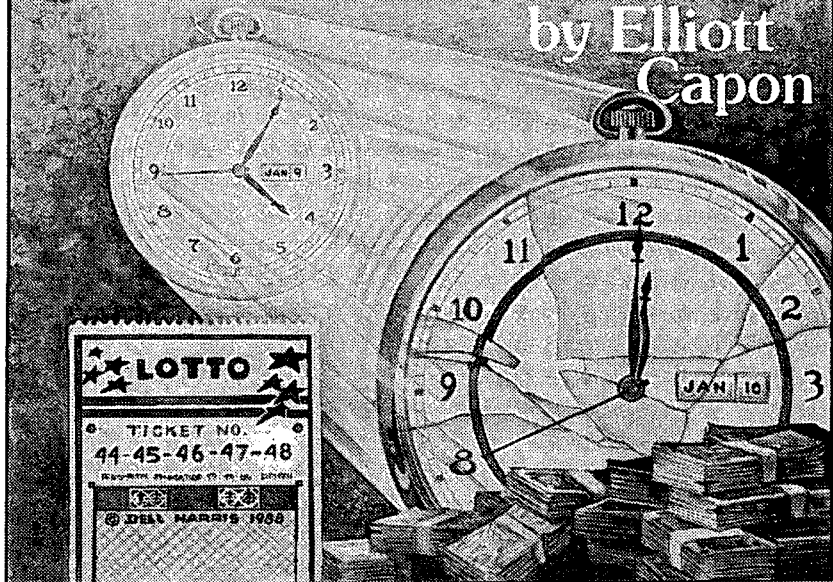
And from that moment on, forever and ever after, she saw their faces smiling down at her, too.

And so perfectly did they fit in, so much did they add to the rendering, that she knew in her heart that that's precisely what the artist *had* had in mind after all.

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The Balls Are in Place

by Elliott
Capon



RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, MONDAY, JANUARY 6, TAPE #7

Testing . . . ah, let me see. Ahem. I guess the melodramatic thing to do would be to say that I have perfected my time machine, and that it's an unqualified success. Unfortunately, that wouldn't be true. I can only transport myself up to thirty-six hours into the future, and I can only remain for about sixty seconds or so. But more important, and probably in keeping with the utterly immutable laws of the entire universe, I do not appear in a corporeal form when I visit the future. I can see, I can hear, within the minute I'm there, I can move around, but I can neither touch anything, be seen or heard. I guess it's impossible for an object to physically exist at a point where the object just, uh, *isn't*, and that my, my,

Illustration by Dell Harris

uh, my *ghost* appearance is all that my or any time machine can manage. But still, I'm happy with it. I mean, it's not bad for somebody working in his basement workshop. Still, I don't know if I'm going to do anything with it, or *what* I can do with it. Well, I built it, I proved it can be done, and that's good enough for me. It's almost six in the morning, I've got to go open the candy store. Um, I don't know, this may be my last journal entry, unless I can think of something else to do with the time machine.

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, TAPE #7

Hello, machine, it's me again. My heart's pounding so hard I can barely talk. I figured out what I want to do with the time machine. I was playing around with it late Wednesday night and . . . all right, let me put this logically. Mr. Prystupki has been coming into the candy store since my father owned it, something like thirty years. And every day he comes in, buys his *Courier*, and then just stands at the end of the counter and reads it. I figured it would be funny to just be a ghost and read it over his shoulder with him, so I got into the machine last night, early this morning, set it for noon tomorrow, when he always comes in, and turned it on. And . . . I was there, *tomorrow*, Friday, and I was reading his paper over his shoulder and I . . . oh boy, I saw the winning lottery numbers for tonight's draw, published on page two of the *Courier* like they do every week. The draw that's on live TV *tonight* at ten thirty, I saw the winning numbers that were published in *tomorrow's* paper. You can play the lottery until nine P.M. when they shut down the computers. I close the store at eight, and tonight, just after I locked the door, I wrote out a lottery card and played it. Tomorrow, I'm going to win . . . I mean, I will have won . . . the lottery. I've got to have a drink.

The Daily Courier, Friday, January 10

CANDY STORE OWNER HITS FIVE MILLION LOTTO BUCKS

Richard Demetrios, owner of Demetrios' Candy Store in the deteriorating River's Edge section of the city, was the only person to have the six winning numbers in last night's lottery drawing. Mr. Demetrios, a sixty-year-old widower with no children, will walk away with \$5 million, \$500,000 in cash now, and the rest paid out over 20 years. When asked if he would retire, Mr. Demetrios said, "This candy store's been in the neighborhood and in my family for 30 years. We can't abandon each other."

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, TAPE #7

I know it's been a week. I can't believe it. All that money, it's beyond my wildest imagination. All the reporters coming to the store to interview me, to watch me just still keep coming back to the store to work from six A.M. to eight P.M. . . . how can I tell them that the store is my life? That the people *need* me, they need this little candy store, they need this little spark of life in a neighborhood of locked up factories and boarded up houses? And I need them. But you know what, tape recorder? I just got back from Friday afternoon. I looked at Prystupki's paper again. And I'm going to play again. I don't know why. God knows I don't need the money. But I *can*, so I think I *will*. I'll give the money to charity, there's no doubt about that. But I think it would be fun to win again.

The Daily Courier, Friday, January 17
RICK THE GREEK STRIKES AGAIN!

Richard Demetrios, the candy store owner who hit \$5 million in last week's state lottery, but kept on working, struck again, winning \$2.2 million in yesterday's draw. State Lottery Director Aloysius Harrison said the odds were "literally astronomical, I might say, and not totally in jest, zillions and zillions to one" against, first, someone getting the six numbers right twice at all, and even more impossible, two weeks in a row. He promised an investigation.

INTEROFFICE MEMO, FRIDAY, JANUARY 17

From: Aloysius Harrison, Director

To: Bernard Cavaletti, Manager of Security

CONFIDENTIAL

Bernie—please check this Demetrios out, lock, stock, and barrel. Replace his lottery terminal if necessary. If there's the slightest chance of cheating, I want him nailed to a cross.

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, FRIDAY, JANUARY 17, TAPE #7

They want to investigate me? They think I'm a crook? Fine. I'll give them something to investigate!

INTEROFFICE MEMO, MONDAY, JANUARY 20

From: Bernard Cavaletti

To: Aloysius Harrison

Demetrios is cleaner than a whistle. I saw his cards, I had his

machine taken out, and every wire examined, checked his friends and family. There's absolutely *nothing* fishy about his wins. I guess he is just the luckiest guy on earth.

The Daily Courier, Monday, January 20

LUCKY RICKY TO DONATE MILLIONS TO CHARITIES

Lottery winner Richard Demetrios has announced that the entire proceeds from his most recent lottery winning, some \$2.2 million, will be donated to the United Way, the March of Dimes, the American Cancer Society, and the Muscular Dystrophy Society, all in equal installments.

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, TAPE #7

Maybe I cleaned them out. The big jackpot is only one million tonight. Still, I've got something to prove. I read Mr. Prystupki's paper, and I'm going for it again.

The Daily Courier, Friday, January 24

RICK DOES IT AGAIN, SPLITS BIG POT

The familiar face of Richard Demetrios showed up again at the state lottery offices early this morning, with another winning ticket. Today, however, Demetrios had to split the pot with another winner, who has yet to come forward. Still, Demetrios will walk away with a cool half million dollars. Not a bad return on a buck, is it?

INTEROFFICE MEMO, FRIDAY, JANUARY 24

From: Aloysius Harrison

To: Bernard Cavaletti

CONFIDENTIAL

Do something! This guy's making us look like fools! Some professor at the state university calculated that the odds of his hitting three weeks in a row are a bunch of sevens and eights followed by *thirty-three zeroes* to one! He's got to be cheating. Find out how!

INTEROFFICE MEMO, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29

From: Bernard Cavaletti

To: Aloysius Harrison

CONFIDENTIAL

Al, we had the guy followed. He gets up, goes to that candy store, stays there all day, waits on a lot of old people and some Spanish and black kids, makes himself about two nickels to rub together,

and then goes home. We rewired his machine, and it's now connected to Lottery Central by cable, not the phone lines. He's not getting information from anyone outside, and now there's no way on God's green earth that someone can be sending him the numbers right into his terminal—which wouldn't do any good anyway, since the numbers are chosen live *after* the system is shut. If he wins tomorrow night, then I'll resign, I swear I will. This guy can no longer cheat.

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, TAPE #8

A new tape for the end of the month. There was someone from the phone company screwing around in front of the store yesterday, but since I'm the only phone on the block, since Benny shut down the shoe store, I know it had to be someone messing with the wires connecting my lottery machine to the main computer. Well, I don't care. I read tomorrow's paper, and I'm going to have six numbers tonight. So there!

The Daily Courier, Friday, January 31

DEMETRIOS' PRIVATE LOTTERY PAYS OFF AGAIN

In what is becoming a rather tiresome bit of reporting, Richard Demetrios was again the sole winner in last night's state lottery draw, pocketing this time \$1.5 million. Demetrios announced that he was buying up all the property on the street where his candy store is located, and is going to build low-income housing, with the total construction costs coming out of his winnings. "This neighborhood's given a lot to me and my family over the past thirty years," he said, "and I'm in a position to give something back."

INTEROFFICE MEMO, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3

From: Aloysius Harrison

To: Bernard Cavaletti

VERY CONFIDENTIAL

Of course I'm not going to hold you to your threat to resign, because you've done everything that could be done. But we have to do *more*! The governor herself is on my back, because not only are we the laughing stock of the whole country, lottery sales have dropped by almost forty percent in the last two weeks—no one thinks they have a chance with Demetrios playing. And the governor was really counting on lottery revenues to pay for her new truck lanes on the turnpike. What are we going to do?

INTEROFFICE MEMO, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

From: Bernard Cavaletti

To: Aloysius Harrison

VERY, VERY CONFIDENTIAL

Here's what we do, and if you say I said it, I'll swear on my mother's grave that you're a child molester and a compulsive liar: we fix Thursday's draw. There are ways it can be done, believe me. And I happen to know that our independent auditor from Clark, Sampol and Siclari has a predilection for sticking a certain powder up his nose. A visit from a friendly police officer bearing first a taste of the coca leaf and then a misplaceable arrest warrant, may encourage him to look the other way. We'll break this cycle yet. But I need your go-ahead. This could get us in a lot of trouble if it comes out.

INTEROFFICE MEMO, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

From: Aloysius Harrison

To: Bernard Cavaletti

Go.

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6, TAPE #8

That's funny. Tonight's lottery draw is coming up 43-44-45-46-47-48. I'd guess that's impossible, but I know that the randomness of the balls makes *any* combination of numbers possible. I mean, *we* ascribe "numbers" and "values" to the balls, to the symbols, but to the balls themselves, they're just . . . balls, with no particular significance. So I guess that after a number of lottery spins, that combination was inevitable, like the chimp infinitely typing and eventually writing *Hamlet*. Oh, one more thing: reporters with TV cameras from all over the world were here to watch me play my numbers. But I wouldn't let them. For all I know, they may have some way of being able to read the numbers I'm playing as I enter them. And that would be cheating. Hahaha.

INTEROFFICE MEMO, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7

From: Aloysius Harrison

To: Bernard Cavaletti

The governor called me in for a quiet meeting this morning. Seems our friend Demetrios walked away with another seven hundred and fifty thousand. Last December the top prize was eleven *million*, but sales have dropped so much that the top money in last night's draw was only seven hundred and fifty G's. And did

you catch the name of the winner? Damn it, Bernie, what are we going to do????!!

The Daily Courier, Tuesday, February 11

GOV'S HEAVY-HANDED LOTTERY PLAY FOLDS

Governor Carter attempted today to suspend play in the state lottery, and to cancel all further lottery draws until an unspecified future date. However, Ira Penner, of the prestigious law firm of Penner, Gentili and Kogen, acting on behalf of multiple-winner Richard Demetrios, got State Supreme Court Justice Geraldine O'Brien to stay the order, claiming that no justification existed for the action. Lottery sales have, of course, plummeted in the past month, due to Demetrios' record-setting streak of good luck.

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, TAPE #8

I don't know what the governor was up to, but she really had no right to try to suspend the lottery like that. If I was keeping the money for myself, that'd be one thing, but I'm spending the money on charity and redeveloping this neighborhood, things the governor should be doing herself, if she wasn't so damned interested in getting all those giant interstate trucks coming through the state. Oh, well, another day, another half a million dollars or so.

The Daily Courier, Friday, February 14

WHERE WAS RICK THE GREEK?

For the first time in several weeks, Richard Demetrios did not show up at state lottery headquarters to claim his winnings. When reached for an interview, Mr. Demetrios shrugged and smiled and said to this reporter, "You can't win 'em all."

INTEROFFICE MEMO, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14

From: Aloysius Harrison

To: Bernard Cavaletti

The computer shows that a game was played at 8:05 P.M. from his machine, just like always, but the son of a bitch didn't win. I think his streak is broken. But still keep an eye on him, all right?

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, TAPE #8

Something strange went on yesterday. I looked in Mr. Prystupki's paper as usual, memorized the numbers as usual, played them as

usual. But I only got five numbers in last night's draw. It paid twenty-two hundred dollars. Maybe I memorized them wrong, I don't know. But I've got a reputation to uphold, haha. So I gave Mr. Prystupki the ticket. Let him take the money, God bless him, and go on that cruise he's been talking about for the last fifteen years. I'll try again next week. I want to give some money to AIDS research.

The Daily Courier, Saturday, February 15

CORRECTION—*We incorrectly reported the winning lottery numbers in yesterday's afternoon edition. The correct numbers were 1-2-6-10-19-29, not 39, as reported. We regret any inconvenience.*

The Daily Courier, Friday, February 21

DEMETRIOS BACK ON TRACK!

The state lottery saw a boomlet in sales this past week, due to the feeling on the part of many people that the incredible lucky streak of candy store owner Richard Demetrios had come to an end. So many people bought tickets that the jackpot was up to eight million dollars. However, four million of that will go to Demetrios, who once again had the six winning numbers, and four million to another lucky player, Lee Feldman, of Cuyandonga County.

INTEROFFICE MEMO, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24

From: Aloysius Harrison

To: Bernard Cavaletti

EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL

The governor called me to the executive mansion yesterday, Sunday. If Demetrios wins one more time, you and me are out of jobs. Worse, she said she'd come up with some kind of frame to "prove" that you and me were in collusion with him, and that she'll see us rot behind bars. The woman is not kidding, Bernie. We *have* to stop Demetrios from winning again. She *wants* that superhighway, and he's stopping her. And he's making her look very bad by single-handedly regenerating that entire stinking, rundown rathole of a neighborhood. His luck *has* to run out, and we have to help it run out. Please!!

INTEROFFICE MEMO, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24

From: Bernard Cavaletti

To: Aloysius Harrison

EXTREMELY CONFIDENTIAL

Ask her to give you a week. I've got to think.

The Daily Courier, Friday, February 28
Demetrios won again last night, netting 1.3 million.

INTEROFFICE MEMO, MONDAY, MARCH 3

From: Bernard Cavaletti

To: Aloysius Harrison

ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENTIAL

I've found a way to stop you-know-who. But it'll be expensive—we've got to come up with a hundred grand, cash. I got in touch with someone who knows someone, etc., etc., and his terminal can be rewired to explode when he punches in his numbers Thursday night. Don't ask how, because I don't know how. I only know that the guy said it could be done, with sufficient force to kill anyone standing right at the machine. If there're any reporters, nearby, they might get hurt, but tough. We'll need a hundred G's by Thursday morning—can you get it?

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, TAPE #8

Oh, my God. I'm shaking like a leaf. I . . . I don't know what to say. All right. I went to read Mr. Prystupki's Friday paper like, like always, but he wasn't there. There was a lot of cops and other people in the store, none of them customers. I didn't know what to do, so after I faded back here, I went through the machine again, I, I adjusted it so that I'd come out near the newsstand at the train station. And, and I saw the headlines of the *Courier*: RICK THE GREEK KILLED IN FREAK ACCIDENT. That's all I could see before I faded back here, and now I'm . . . I'm too nervous to try it again. S . . . sometime tomorrow, I'm going to be killed in a freak accident. Oh, God, what am I going to do?

RICHARD DEMETRIOS' JOURNAL, THURSDAY, MARCH 6, TAPE #8

I didn't sleep at all last night. I spent the entire night shaking. But then, towards dawn, I think I became a little more resolute, a little more resigned. If I must die, I must, we all must, and few it is who are given the opportunity to make preparations. I called the lawyer this morning and changed my will, leaving every cent I have to a number of charities and a trust fund to finish the construction of the housing project here. And I called Mr. Harrison,

the head of the state lottery, for an appointment. I want to go to him and tell him exactly what I did, how I won all that money. If they want to stop the annuity payments, well, that'll be between their lawyers and mine, I won't be around to care, but at least the money I already got will go to good causes. All right. I'm leaving for downtown now. I just hope I don't get killed till after I've cleared my conscience.

The Daily Courier, Friday, March 7

RICK THE GREEK KILLED IN FREAK ACCIDENT

Richard Demetrios, world-famous multi-lottery winner, was killed today in a freak accident. He was at the headquarters of the state division of the lottery, downtown, when the pilot of a small plane apparently suffered a heart attack and crashed his plane into the top floor of 31 North 201st Street, where the lottery has its offices. Demetrios was killed, along with lottery chief Aloysius Harrison and lottery Head of Security Bernard Cavaletti, with whom he was meeting at the time. No one knows what the meeting was about.

(continued from page 3)

be around some of the time, and want to thank her heartily for being such a loyal and enthusiastic staff member all this time.

Carol Harper presently lives in Houston, having recently moved there from California. We first began reading her reviews in the pages of the *MRA Journal*, *The Journal of Mystery Readers International*,

about which we wrote in this space in the March 1988 issue. Carol is associate editor of that organization, and her other hat is that of biology professor; she holds a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Florida and presently teaches at Houston Community College. We know we'll all be as pleased—and assisted by—Carol's comments on current mystery fare as we always have been with Mary's.



Last Tangle in Motown

by J. Edward Ames

I couldn't decide which was worse to wake up to: a tennis ball crammed halfway into my mouth or a Browning 9mm. parabellum staring into my phiz. At least the gun wasn't threatening to dislocate my jaw.

On the other hand, the tennis ball didn't have a Maxim silencer screwed into it.

"Morning, schmuck."

My sleep-bleary eyes gradually focused on the speaker. I took in a vulpine face with a

chin like a bony knee, mirror-surface aviator glasses, a cheap Dacron and polyester suit the color of steel wool. Just behind him stood a goon with a pair of bowling pins for forearms and a leer that would have terrorized Attila the Hun.

Pain was strobing through my jaw. I reached up to grab the ball, but the weasel face with the Browning slapped my hand away.

"Not so fast, Mackenzie. We

got a message for you. After it's delivered, we leave—then you can spit the ball out."

I blinked stupidly, struggled up on one elbow, thumbed a rough crumb of sleep from my left eye. Through the bedroom's only window, I saw that dawn was still a salmon-pink streak on the eastern horizon. I made a guttural strangling noise that signified a desperate "okay."

"You catch on quick. Now lissenup."

The speaker paused to reach into a pocket and pull out one of those World War Two Zippos, the special GI issue that was painted flat black to cut reflection. Next he extracted a crumpled pack of cigarettes—imported Gauloises, I noticed—and lit one. He took his time, staring at me like I was something he had just scraped off his shoe.

"My principals," he resumed, cigarette jerking with each word, "are in the information business. They recently entered into a . . . liaison with a woman named Carla Adams."

Despite the incredible pain lancing through my neck and jaw, I started visibly at the mention of Carla. A snake-swift grin creased the speaker's face before he resumed his deadpan monologue.

"My principals have asked me to inform you that Miss Adams will soon establish contact with

you as per certain instructions you will receive shortly. At that time she will brief you completely as to the nature of her . . . negotiations with my employers. You will wait until the specified time—do not attempt to liaise with her any earlier."

The entire time he was speaking, his thumb was snicking the cap of the Zippo up and down. I was beginning to understand that he was some kind of self-styled "operative": the foreign cigarettes, the mirror shades, the talk of "principals" and "liaising" and "establishing contact." Plus, he wore a Sears catalog trenchcoat with fake leather buttons. This was a local hood with international pretensions.

"If you play this one up front," he continued, "if you put all your marbles on the table and leave them there, you're in line to make more money than you've ever laid your grubby little fingers on. But if you attempt to turn me or my principals around . . ."

He nodded and the goon stepped closer to the bed, grinning at me with wet lips the color of chopped liver. He swept his creased linen jacket open and I saw a grungy denim suit beneath it. I also took in a stubby little submachine gun snugged into a tight canvas halter on the inside of the coat.

"The SMG is a German model MP-5." Weasel Face narrated like the host of a fashion show announcing the latest gown by Christian Dior. "Shoots steel-jacketed slugs that shred the target on impact. Rollo here takes a sorta religious pride in never missing."

Rollo closed his jacket and stepped back behind his superior. Weasel Face slipped the Browning into a chamois holster under his left armpit. Then he bent down—way down—until his nose was almost kissing mine. My breath fogged the reflecting surfaces of his glasses.

"But try to burn us, schmo, and it won't be that quick. Before Rollo stitches you full of snake holes, I guarantee we're gonna pack your nostrils with gunpowder and light them—one at a time." He snicked the Zippo in my face for emphasis. "Catch my drift?"

My vigorous nods were punctuated by sucking-drain noises behind the tennis ball. For a moment I forgot the pain.

Weasel Face blew smoke in my face, stood back up. "Personally, I doubt if you could locate your own reflection in a hall of mirrors. But this Adams woman seems to think you know the information-gathering business. So my principals have decided they want you."

He flipped an envelope on top the blankets, then tapped the

ball out of my mouth, almost snapping one of my porcelain crowns. The intruders were halfway to the bedroom door before I managed to croak:

"What if I don't want the job—whatever it is? You're going to torture me into cooperating?"

Weasel Face paused, pivoted slowly around. "Enjoyable as that would be, I don't think it'll be necessary. Open the envelope."

I did. A small sheet of classy vellum stationery bore the neatly printed words: NEXT WEDNESDAY AT NOON, THE CAFÉ IN FRONT OF THE ZOO ON BELLE ISLE. It was signed "C." Tucked behind the note was a packet of one hundred crisp, brand-spanking-new hundred dollar bills.

"That's a *very* modest retainer," said my tormentor. "Multiply it by twenty-five, and that's what you stand to make on this operation."

I've always been lousy at math in my head, but no matter where I placed the comma the figure looked good.

I massaged my sore jaw, then smiled at the departing guests. "It's been real, fellas," I called as they thunked the door shut behind them.

The day of my meeting with Carla turned out breezeless and humid under a sky the color of

a sidewalk. The grainy pollution haze thickened gradually as I followed I-94 east, bisecting Detroit.

With native indifference, I paid little attention to the belching smokestacks of the auto plants dotting the route; they would hold more charm for me on the way home, however, after I had learned that those mammoth stacks were about to cough up a fortune for me.

Belle Isle hunkers smack in the middle of the Detroit River, halfway between Motown and Windsor. I crossed the MacArthur Bridge and located a multilevel parking garage a block from the zoo.

The café Carla had mentioned was one of those touristy little sidewalk bistros with wrought-iron tables and chairs under gay umbrellas advertising Cinzano. Until that moment I was sure that Carla no longer existed in my mind as anything except pleasant memories and an occasional business prospect. But the quick little loss-of-gravity tickle in my stomach, when I spotted her waving at me, hinted otherwise.

"We meet again, handsome one," she greeted me in the purring contralto that always makes me think of Lauren Bacall.

"We do," I conceded, "in spite of the efforts of that Mutt and

Jeff comedy team you sicced on me a few days ago."

A waiter glissaded over and I ordered *café au lait*. Before I sat down, I let my gaze linger on my former lover. She wore a pretty Victorian lace blouse tucked into a pair of white cotton drawstring pants. Thank God she hadn't done her luxuriant hair up in some spike-cut New Wave weirdness: it still cascaded down her back and around her shoulders in a riot of mahogany waves.

"So," she said, indulging my appraisal with a brief smile, "you met Mr. Boyda and his friend Rollo? Believe me, Neal, that wasn't my idea. They belong to my employer."

I had planned to play the heavy some more, so she wouldn't get the impression I was coming into this gig too eager or hard up, both of which I certainly was. But, as always, I couldn't maintain a convincing glare into those huge, nimbus-gray eyes.

"Okay. Fine. So your employer likes to play hardball. I can tolerate a little rough handling if the price is right."

I shrugged one shoulder, settled back, blew the steam off my coffee before taking a sip. "Speaking of your employer, I heard you were working as a secretary out at the National Motors experimental facility in Redford Township?"

"You heard right. Executive secretary to the plant supervisor, as a matter of fact. But that's not exactly the employer I meant."

"Didn't think it was. The day you're content to work as office missy for some bozo in wingtips is the same day I'll be hawking hot dogs out at Tiger Stadium."

A flinty hardness suddenly replaced the welcoming sparkle in her eyes. "You always did conveniently forget: I share only the profits, not your hereditary loathing for decency."

For a moment the old, acidic bitterness erupted up my esophagus.

"A thousand pardons, Your Haughtiness! I should've remembered: you're the girl who can't make commitments to criminal lowlifes like me, aren't you? Not when you're saving your heart for a naive young lawyer or doctor who believes in God, guts, and the American Way."

At that moment I'm sure she was on the feather edge of walking away. Walking away, and taking my cool quarter-million with her. Then: "Bastard," she muttered, but without any real venom, and I knew the crisis had passed.

"Bite your lip any harder," I said, "and it's going to bleed."

We both laughed then, abruptly, genuinely, heartily, like we used to in the old days.

But the feeling was bitter-sweet.

"So talk to me, lady," I said after the waiter brought our second *café au lait*.

"For starters, let's talk about tapping into the very mother lode of inside corporate skinny."

The remark threw me, but knowing Carla, it was leading someplace. I stared at those wing-shaped gray eyes, the pupils like two chips of glittering obsidian. This was no "office missy" talking, but a shrewd woman leading up to something very big time. The blood was suddenly tight in my temples.

"Cute," I said. "Very dramatic. But I like to start with the bottom line and you know that. So skip the subtle stuff—what in the hell are you talking about?"

"Patience, love. What do you know about the National Motors facility where I work?"

"They call it their experimental plant, right? Research and design stuff . . ."

I trailed off, watching her a little more closely as I began to catch on.

"Right." Her words started tumbling out faster. "It's a maximum-security installation where they test new engine innovations for upcoming models. We're located in a heavily wooded area near Six Mile Road, inside a strong but not-too-con-

spicuous Cyclone fence. There are a few low-key security guards, but most of the surveillance is electronic—they don't want to attract undue publicity."

"Hold it," I objected. "If you're talking about breaking in—"

"Shush! Let me finish. From certain memos and snippets of conversation I've overheard, I know my boss has been charged with heading some revolutionary new breakthrough in engine design. Something so revolutionary that it could put National light years ahead of the foreign and domestic competition. Presto. No more production over-capacity because suddenly there is a car with something radically new and better."

"Any idea what this miracle something is?"

She shook her head. "None at all, but they're very excited about being close to achieving it. And that's where you come in. I've already made contact with . . . interested parties representing the competition. The same ones who paid your retainer."

"Yeah," I said dryly, rubbing my jaw. "Carla, baby, listen. The background sounds great. Just one problem: where's my handle on all this? You know I'm strictly an inside man. A break-in is out of the question."

Again here eyes sparked at me.

"That's where we both come in. My boss is hiring a guard to augment the security staff. A person who won't be supplied by the agency we usually rely on. A sort of informal overseer," she added meaningfully. "He will be told very little about the facility's mission, true. But he will also have carte blanche to patrol the front office complex and most of the grounds. The help-wanted ad goes in the papers next Monday."

"Oh, that's just peachy. Unemployment in the Detroit area is only hovering around fifteen percent, and I'm supposed to waltz—"

"I will screen the applicants and make the initial recommendation. My boss trusts me. He'll go through the motions of an interview, but he's almost sure to accept my judgment. He usually does."

I gazed out across the river, no more objections left.

"Well? Are you interested?" said Carla.

I signaled the waiter to bring our bill. My lips twitched into a grin. "Is a pig happy in the mud?"

As things turned out, it was a prophetic analogy.

At first, the National Motors Experimental Facility struck me as an over-protected junkyard.

The fifteen-foot chain-link fence; the rural location; the twenty-four-hour security guard; the routine policy of searching all packages or containers—even employee lunch pails—entering or leaving; the sweep-scan video cameras mounted everywhere. I half expected to find an automotive version of the starship *Enterprise*.

But the grounds were strewn with nothing but old, dinged-up sedans and station wagons, most sans engines. Not a car anywhere newer than a '79 or '80, and many were even late 60's models. Nothing that seemed to merit a fleabitten guard dog, much less such ultra-security.

Until I got my first peek at the steeply banked, figure-eight tarmac track out back.

Imagine one of those late 60's rattletraps whizzing around that track, accelerating with the instant frictionless response of a high-powered snowmobile and producing little more engine noise than an electric golf cart. Imagine a ten-year-old sedan, fenders flapping like metallic wings, covering a quarter mile in eight seconds with nary a puff of exhaust smoke. Imagine that, and you'll realize what I did: whatever was being put *under* those beat-up hoods justified the security.

Unfortunately, the huge, hangar-like corrugated steel

garage was off limits to anyone except technicians and executive staffers. And it was in the garage that the mechanical magic was being worked, turning those gutted hulls dotting the yard into the super-swift, super-efficient machines rocketing around that track.

As Carla had predicted, I was a shoo-in for the security job. Steve Jernigan, the plant supervisor, was duly impressed by my fake letters of recommendation and *curriculum vitae*. During the interview I made several references to being a team player, eliciting an approving smile each time. I was hired as soon as I cleared the routine state police and FBI fingerprint check.

I'd been on the job for a week, gleaned precious little and restricting all interaction with Carla to mere pleasantries about the weather. Then, one afternoon as I made a routine trip past her desk in the executive suite:

"Hello there, Mr. Mackenzie," she greeted me, efficient fingers expertly filing papers into a folder. "Learning your way around?"

I paused, aware of the blood suddenly throbbing in my palms. I was decked out in my security get-up: dark chino pants, shortsleeved blue cotton shirt, a ridiculous bus driver's cap with a dime store badge.

"You might need a raincoat by next Monday," she cautioned me. "The weatherman predicts rain by early afternoon. It's not expected to clear up until Wednesday."

I nodded. "Thanks for the tip. I hate to get wet."

She made a cute little *moue*. "So do I! I must have at least seven umbrellas around here."

Our little exchange left me feeling both elated and apprehensive. Elated, because Carla had just informed me, in our prearranged code, that an important executive staff meeting was taking place next Monday at one P.M. Apprehensive, because our man Boyda wanted to meet with me in a week for my first full progress report. So far I had very little to tell; I began to wonder how much gunpowder a human nostril could hold.

On Monday, as we had arranged, Carla paid a visit to the Xerox room right after lunch. That left her office, which was immediately adjacent to Jernigan's office and the conference room, empty—empty, except for the sweep-scan camera mounted inconspicuously in one corner. Jernigan had already instructed me to stick around the front offices that afternoon, though he discreetly refrained from mentioning any meeting.

I played the polite staffer, repeatedly muttering "Good

afternoon, sir," or "How are you today, ma'am?" as a gaggle of blue-suited execs armed with Bally briefcases and yellow legal pads filed past me into the conference room. Then I gave Jernigan a few minutes to call the meeting to order before I went into action.

The front office suite was lined with plush redwood panels on three sides, but the conference room was obviously a later addition. It was divided from the main area by a textured sheetrock wall behind a bank of gunmetal filing cabinets. I had already noted a narrow but traversable defile splitting the bank of cabinets. I had also already verified the reason for the opening.

When I was sure the meeting was under way, I sauntered toward the hallway door, watching the camera from the corner of one eye. It was calibrated to sweep a full one hundred and eighty degrees in ten seconds before reversing direction. At the moment it finished its sweep in my direction I was closing the door behind me. I counted five seconds then rushed back inside, diving into the space dividing the filing cabinets. Before the camera could pick me up again, I was crouched down out of sight.

I wormed my way closer to the wall, pressed one ear against it. As I expected, I could hear

the steady droning of Jernigan's voice, but couldn't quite make out his words.

It took me only a few seconds, using the small Phillips screwdriver on my keychain, to pop the plastic plate off the wall socket in front of me—access to which explained the opening between the cabinets. A minute later I had removed the guts of the unit. It was a dual-direction outlet, and all that remained was the plate on the opposite side of the wall. My neck was greasy with nervous perspiration, but I smiled triumphantly: listening carefully, I could make out Jernigan's words.

"—know full well, ladies and gentlemen, that the competition, foreign *and* domestic, is expecting us to respond to lagging sales and recent layoffs with routine design changes. But the fact is, our management has more in mind than simple cosmetic alterations intended to recoup a fair share of the auto market. We aren't just trying to stay on our feet—we're going for the knockout punch."

This guy was a pro at building suspense. The room buzzed with excitement for a moment. When the murmurs died down, Jernigan continued.

"In order for us to once again ensure long-term domination of the marketplace, we must make a quantum leap in technology.

Towards that end we are currently in the final stages of a top-secret breakthrough—a breakthrough so secret, in fact, that we have even delayed applying for a patent in order to prevent leaks. Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to announce that National Motors is about to submit for immediate production a revolutionary turbo jet-assisted internal-combustion engine. One which will make our cars the fastest, cleanest, quietest, most fuel-efficient vehicles anywhere in the world."

Again the room erupted in buzzing conversation. My lips tugged into a smile of the ear-to-ear variety. Unfortunately, I couldn't wait around for details. Carla was due back in a few minutes, meaning other secretarial staffers would soon be popping in and out.

Stand by, Weasel Face, I thought as I hastily reassembled the socket. This should keep your "principals" interested for a while.

"Lissenup, schmo. Your word don't mean diddly without proof. How do my principals know you aren't trying to turn us around?"

I could see my face reflected clearly in Boyda's aviator glasses. While he stared at me through those twin iced mir-

rors, one thumb repeatedly snicked the top of his Zippo up and down. But this time I wasn't trapped in bed with a tennis ball jammed into my mouth. And his hardboiled routine was getting old fast.

"You know the game," I said wearily. "Shoot me full of sodium pentothal, hypnotize me, grill me all you want. But don't rush me. This is big. Bigger than both of us, stout lad, and I need more time."

"You keep cracking wise on me, bubblebrain—" Boyda's head swiveled slightly to the right where Rollo completed our cosy little threesome at the café table "—and the boys in the drool wagon are gonna be hauling you off to the monkey-house. Catch my drift?"

Rollo was using the edge of a matchbook cover to clean the gunk from under his fingernails. His eyes focused somewhere near the end of my chin. I noticed the badge pinned to his jacket: YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY MISTAKEN ME FOR SOMEONE WHO CARES.

"Look," I told Boyda, trying to keep my voice level, "I don't deal in disinformation, okay? That's a quick way to end up deep-sixed in my business. So just cool it with the campy threats."

"You look, schmuck—I didn't ask for a deep philosophical view on your lifestyle. Skip the

kibitzing. You got one week to produce."

I finished my coffee, gave both of them my most endearing smile. "Well, fellas, as usual it's been real."

As I strolled away from the table, I felt Rollo's eyes dividing me into kill zones.

The facility's sodium-vapor lights cast eerie, anemic penumbræ in the early evening darkness.

I crossed from the main office complex toward the now-deserted garage, hearing nothing but the serenade of the wind in the nearby trees and the distant scrawking of crows.

I tried to pretend that the sign over the garage entrance wasn't really staring accusingly back at me: AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY!

A thick Yale padlock secured the steel-reinforced door. Nabbing the key from Jernigan's desk drawer and copying it had been Carla's task; mine was to outmaneuver the yard cameras and get inside before I was noticed on the video monitor in the guard shack up by the front gate. At the moment, the guard was distracted by a late-arriving delivery truck.

The key clicked as it snugged into the padlock. Pulse thudding in my ears, I snapped the lock open and slid it out of the hasp. The buffed-steel door-

knob was cold in my grip. I had just started to turn it when the challenge sounded.

"Hold it! What's going on?"

My face drained cold. I turned to confront the accusing stare of Marty Hanchon, one of the night guards.

I swallowed the stone in my throat and forced myself to speak casually.

"Relax, guy. You scared the bejesus out of me."

I dipped two fingers into my shirt pocket, fished out a neatly folded sheet. I unfolded it and handed it to Marty. It was a "memo" I had instructed Carla to type on Jernigan's official stationery:

FROM: Steve Jernigan, Supervisor, National Experimental Facility

TO: All Security Personnel

SUBJECT: New Security Procedure

Be advised that this office has recently authorized periodic, after-hours searches of all toolboxes in the main garage, to be conducted by the internal security guard, Neal Mackenzie. All agency guards are instructed to cooperate in maintaining the secrecy of this policy.

Marty stared uncertainly at it, started to reach for the push-to-talk switch on the radio handset covering his left hip.

"I don't know about this, Mr. Mackenzie. I better check with Smitty up at the shack."

I raised my hands in mock surrender. "Go ahead, Marty—I give up! I'm actually a corporate spy ripping off valuable info. See, I'm in league with the boss's secretary, and we—"

"Okay, okay." Even in the subdued lighting, I saw the kid actually blush as he handed the memo back. "Sorry."

"No problem," I assured him. "You're just a little too eager to do your job. Now let me do mine."

He took the cue and left. I slipped inside, knowing I was safe from cameras in here: the area was considered too sensitive to permit monitoring. I waited a few moments, letting my pupils adjust to the silvery light filtering through the pebbled plexiglass windows. The place was a motley confusion. Partially assembled autos with their hoods yawning wide were scattered about. Lumpy tarps concealed objects resting on solid metal horses. Oxyacetylene torches and hydraulic jacks and wheeled toolboxes dotted the area.

I lifted the nearest tarp and felt my heartbeat quicken.

True, my automotive IQ is limited to locating radiator caps and distinguishing the battery from the alternator. But even I understood that the sleek-

finned, dull-gleaming, aluminum-alloy beauty under that canvas represented the vanguard of transportation technology.

The toolboxes were easy to jimmy with a short length of copper wire. I struck paydirt while rifling the third one—in the middle drawer, crammed under a tray of metric sockets, I found a dogeared technical manual covered with greasy fingerprints. It was labeled OPERATIONAL DIAGRAMS, THE PROPUL-12 TURBOJET-ASSISTED ENGINE.

Carla had previously clued me in about the small office at the rear of the garage, which included a Xerox copier. Ten minutes later I was locking the place up again.

And wondering if Carla could love a dishonest man if he also happened to be rich.

Steve Jernigan was disappointed, but understanding, when I explained that I was quitting so soon because I'd been offered a lucrative security position in Maine. As for Boyda, this *soi-disant* operative actually hinted that his "principals" were pleased with my "covert mission." My cool quarter-million was duly paid in full.

And Carla? As always after one of our team efforts, she

went her own independent way. So naturally I was delighted—albeit surprised—when she called me less than a month later, requesting a meeting at the usual place.

But my curiosity was transformed into a cold lump of suspicion when I arrived at the sidewalk café and found her sitting hand in hand with Jernigan.

"Maybe he isn't a naive young doctor or lawyer, Neal," she greeted me. "But he *is* my husband. And like you said: He believes in God, guts, and the American Way."

My stomach clenched like a fist, and I suddenly felt like I was trying to swallow a nail sideways. I sat down—hard.

"I hate to sound like a B-grade western," said Jernigan, not unkindly, "but I'd advise you to take your money and get out of town."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean you were set up. From Day One. The so-called security job, the trumped-up executive meeting, the phony technical manual, the whole schmeer. Carla and I have been married for nearly a year. Before she accepted my proposal, she filled me in on her . . . past activities with you. It was my idea to turn her—and your—talents into something useful for the company."

"But if this new turbojet's not

legit, what about those cars I watched on the track? And why was I paid so much by—”

“Oh, it’s legit. But it still needs plenty of debugging. Right now it’s like a top-notch boxer who can only go four rounds. That bogus manual you copied leads our competitor to believe that the engine has been completely field-tested and is now fully operable. But, in fact, the engine always blows up at precisely three hundred hours of operation because of internal stress factors that can’t be absorbed by any known metal. Market-wise, it won’t be feasible for another ten years, if then. We’ve scrapped the idea.”

I looked around dazed, trying to spot the truck that had just broadsided me.

“How much time?” I spoke just above a whisper.

“Before they find out?” Jernigan shrugged. “Hard to say. If they’re diligent, they’ll eventually double-check one engine long enough to discover the three-hundred-hour stress limit. If not . . .” He grinned. “They’re heading for a helluva fall from financial grace. We have word that they’ve applied for a patent and are planning to introduce the engine in a major new

line of cars. The marketing blitz is being designed right now. This could very well ruin them.”

Either way, *I* was the fall guy. Carla had played the role of a mere go-between. Vividly, I imagined Rollo’s liver-lipped leer, the stubby SMG he carried right next to his heart.

“This wasn’t anything personal,” Jernigan said. “In fact, I like you. That’s why we’re having this little meeting.”

Carla laughed, a silvery-smooth, tinkling laugh like ice cubes clinking in a glass. “And you *do* have their money,” she added. “If you run fast.”

“I’m running,” I assured her, standing up. I met Jernigan’s eye. He tried not to smile, but lost the struggle.

I forced out a long, nasal sigh managing to come up with a weak but nervy little grin to match his. After all, this guy was a pro who had beat me at the game I play best. Besides, he was married to the woman I love. It was either concede gracefully or kill him.

“It’s been real,” I said.

I took one last, lingering look at the gleaming skyline of Detroit, then left to buy a one-way plane ticket.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



A. N. Jaffe

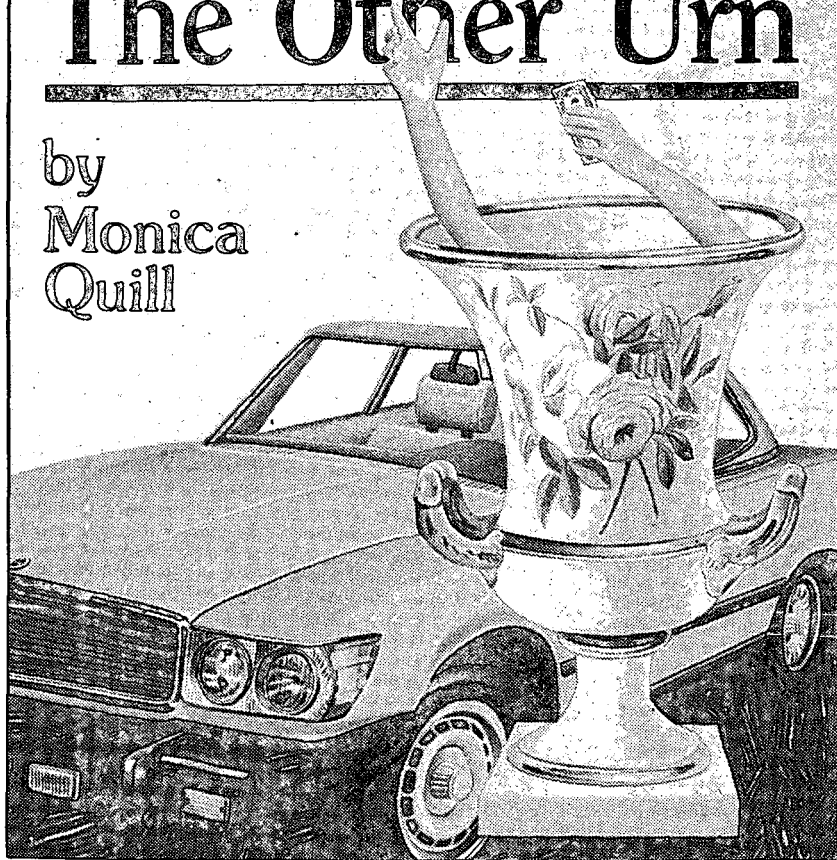
The lookout? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the November Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

The Other Urn

by
Monica
Quill



When Bridget Barry, who had taught Renaissance history at the college once owned and operated by the Sisters of Martha and Mary (the M & M's), came to visit Sister Mary Teresa in

the house on Walton Street in Chicago, it was time to kill the fatted calf. Which, Joyce suggested to Kim, might be Bridget herself. She had put on weight, no doubt of that, but then Emtee Dempsey was a bit of a but-

terball herself. They made a pair.

Sister Mary Teresa (Emtee) Dempsey still wore the traditional headdress of the order, which gave the general impression of a seagull landing on her head. A starched wimple, black robes, a rosary clacking from her cincture—she had been dressing like this for over fifty years and she did not intend to change now. Kim and Joyce, on the other hand, dressed like anyone else, except for a cross pinned to the lapel indicating their religious profession. The three of them in this house on Walton Street were all that was left of the M & M's. They had renewed themselves almost into oblivion, selling off their college, a money-losing enterprise at the time, and turning to more relevant work. That had resulted in a mass exodus from the order.

"Who would have dreamed it would come to this?" Bridget asked, but Emtee Dempsey waved away such keening with a pudgy hand.

"The three of us are carrying on. If God wants the order to go on, he will send us vocations."

"You can't complain about your accommodations," Bridget said. Kim had given her a tour of the house, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and now sat with their guest in

the study where Sister Mary Teresa each day added her quota of pages to the massive history of the twelfth century she was writing.

"How long will you be doing research at the Newberry, Bridget?"

"Another week, more or less."

Brows rose above the old nun's round spectacles. "How long have you been in Chicago without contacting me?"

Bridget was having none of that. "In the first place, you are very hard to find. I phoned Katherine Senski, and she gave me your number. Why an unlisted number?"

"You said in the first place."

"Yes." Bridget's merry face darkened. "Do you remember Vivian Green, one of our alumnae?"

The old nun shut her eyes. You could almost hear the whirring. "Class of '75. Black hair, ivory skin? She got a B—in medieval history."

"Well, she got an A+ in Renaissance history. You were always stingy with high grades."

"Because God is stingy with brains. What about Vivian?"

"We've kept in touch. She was admitted to the graduate school at the University of Chicago but in the first semester decided it was not for her. Now stop nodding as if some theory of yours had been proved. She

had the talent, she didn't have the interest. She switched to law."

Emtee Dempsey groaned. "Another! What on earth will we do with all these lawyers?"

"Vivian passed the bar, but she has never practiced law in the usual sense. She got a job as vice-director and subsequently became director of a small foundation. She has done very well. Beautiful apartment, not terribly far from here as the gull flies, a very posh lakeside address. She looks out over the lake."

"So you found time to visit her?" Emtee Dempsey began.

"Not this time. That's what worries me. At the foundation, my call wasn't put through, and then when I called her at home, she made it very brief. I had come at just the wrong time."

Kim said, "Maybe if you had let her know you were coming."

"I did. I dropped her a note over a month ago, asking that she reply only if this would not be a good time for us to get together." Bridget who had been sitting forward deflated visibly while saying this.

"It's not at all like Vivian."

Maybe yes, maybe no. Kim wondered if the younger woman had really been that thrilled to see her old professor. However brilliant she was, Bridget Barry was not a very prepossessing figure.

Before Bridget left, promises were made all around that they would get together for a really good session before Emtee Dempsey's former colleague left Chicago.

"What we will do," Sister Mary Teresa said when their guest was gone, "is have a tribute to Bridget Barry by a small group of colleagues and selected former students. Particularly one." The old nun picked up her fountain pen, unscrewed its cap, and said to Kim, "Your job will be to contact Vivian Green."

"Maybe she just doesn't want to keep up the contacts."

"Nonsense. She was completely devoted to Bridget."

"Well, there could be other reasons."

"Precisely."

She pulled a piece of paper toward her, and soon the room was filled with the sound of pen on paper. Kim had been dismissed. Dismissed with a task. It was infuriating how Emtee Dempsey put the weight of her whims on other shoulders. Kim turned on her heel and went into the kitchen. Something fragrant was in the oven. Joyce in slacks and a sweatshirt with the legend UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA emblazoned on it sat at the table frowning over a crossword.

"We are going to have a little party for Bridget Barry."

"Good. What does 'magisterial' mean?"

"You see it everyday, in the study."

"Fat?"

"Joyce! 'Speaking with a master's authority.' Do you remember a student named Vivian Green."

"Sure." Joyce didn't even look up.

"Are you serious?"

"She played soccer." Joyce looked at Kim and added, "Not well, but with enthusiasm."

Kim went to the stove and poured herself a cup of coffee. Emtee Dempsey had remembered Vivian Green, and now Joyce acted as if she had seen her just the other day. Kim said as much.

"I did. Well, not the other day. She lives or works around here. I saw her in that little gourmet store several blocks over when I was getting the caviar Emtee was sure Mr. Rush would like." Rush was their lawyer; he hadn't liked the caviar.

"It must be some other lawyer who likes it," the old nun had said, regaining the upper hand. Rush spent the rest of the evening trying not to ask if she were consulting someone else. Not very likely. Rush had been on the board of the college and had maneuvered them through the difficult times that ended with their keeping this house

on Walton Street as well as some lake property in Indiana.

"Did you talk to her?" Kim asked Joyce.

"A little. She looked very prosperous, though. I mentioned the soccer, and I thought she was going to cry. You know how it is when you seem to remind someone of better days? I felt like that."

"I have the job of making sure she comes to the party for Bridget."

"The way she acted, anything connected with her college days would be attractive to her."

It was a temptation to shift the burden to Joyce's shoulders, but Kim did not succumb. Emtee Dempsey almost never put things in terms of obedience, but she was Kim's religious superior. And there was a definite division of labor in this diminished community. Joyce's province was the kitchen and household. Kim was in graduate school at Northwestern but also Emtee Dempsey's research assistant, a function the old nun interpreted in a very commodious manner. Kim would not have been human if she did not sometimes feel resentment, but she had not become a nun for the fun of it.

Emtee Dempsey had played a large role in Kim's vocation. The combination of great intellect and a religious life had a powerful appeal, and the ap-

peal survived the tumultuous days when they had closed the college, handed out the money they got for it, and begun to swim in the sea of the people. When things settled down, Kim retained her desire to lead her life as Emtee Dempsey had hers, although what that meant in the present state of affairs was unclear. But then she had learned trust in God from the old nun, too.

Green, Vivian, was not in the telephone directory. Nor any Green, V. She worked for a small foundation, Bridget had said, but Kim could not go by the Newberry and ask Bridget the name of it. This was supposed to be a surprise. She put through a call to Katherine Senski, veteran writer for the *Tribune* and fellow campaigner with Emtee Dempsey whose junior she claimed improbably to be. Nonetheless, she had retained her job at the *Tribune* through recent changes in ownership and continued to do features. Like Emtee she would not know what retirement meant even if she were doing a crossword puzzle.

"Bridget Barry! Of course I'll come. It's a splendid idea. Actually I think we ought to do something far more grand. A reunion of all former faculty and students."

"Katherine, wait. We won't have the get-together Emtee

Dempsey wants if I can't locate Vivian Green."

"Who's Vivian Green?"

"Thank God you don't know."

"You are being enigmatic, Sister Kimberly."

"She was a student of Bridget's, they have kept in touch, Bridget is now in town and Vivian is too busy to see her, and she's convinced something is wrong."

"Has it occurred to Bridget that her conversation might not be as scintillating to a young woman as you and I find it."

"When did I cease being a young woman?"

"Take it as a compliment, for heaven's sake. I don't want you getting sensitive."

"The received opinion is that Vivian genuinely admires Bridget Barry and would not miss a chance to see her if she could."

"She might be genuinely busy, my dear."

"That is what I have to find out."

"Well, call her."

Finally they had arrived at the point of the call. Katherine hummed while Kim explained, then said, "My dear, the listing of private foundations in this country demands two extremely stout volumes. The Illinois section, as I remember, runs pages and pages."

"It is a small family foundation."

"Most them are. Most of them are fairly obvious dodges enabling the wealthy to distribute their own excess income rather than let the government do it. Often they have a single purpose, very narrowly defined."

Katherine was defining an impossible task.

"Of course I am. This is another argument for keeping up the alumni directory. Rush can complain about expense. I say charge a fee. Alumnae want to keep in touch, and women have this medieval habit of changing their names when they marry."

"It is not a medieval habit. It was not done then."

"Is that true?" Katherine was delighted.

"I have it on the highest authority."

"How long has Vivian Green worked with this foundation?"

But Kim had the thought herself. As one of the foes of another edition of the alumnae directory, she must have wiped it from her mind. The donkey work had of course devolved on Kim, and a new edition would cost her at least another year before she completed her dissertation.

"I'll look her up."

"I am doing that now. You say your job is research assistant? Ah, here it is. The Apeiron Foundation. Well, they didn't use the family name. Got a pencil?"

Kim jotted down the address. She took down the telephone number too but decided to go in person. She did not want to risk a repetition of the treatment Bridget Barry had received.

The Apeiron Foundation was in Evanston, and when Kim's taxi arrived at the address, she was surprised to find that it was in a residential neighborhood and, like its neighbors, a private house. She felt vaguely like a saleslady standing on the doorstep after ringing the bell. Avon calling.

After a decent interval, she rang again. Almost immediately the door opened and a forbidding looking man of middle height looked impatiently out at her.

"I've come to see Vivian Green."

He stepped to one side to let her pass, still frowning. She waited until he had closed the door, then followed him. The smell of flowers was heavy in the house, and it seemed ill lit. Her guide led the way to an open door, then again stood aside. Kim started into the room, then stopped with a gasp.

The burnished urn was enshrined on an altar with a photograph propped up behind it, surrounded by flowers. The light was muted, there was a priedieu. Kim moved toward the urn, knelt, and looked at the

photographed features of what had once been a beautiful young woman.

2

Some minutes later, Kim rose from her knees and turned. The man in the doorway was not the one who had answered the door. White unruly hair, a stoop that seemed an apology for his height, penetrating blue eyes that seemed to search Kim's face. He held out his hand.

"Ambrose Ellis." The words seemed to ride a musical undertone.

"Sister Kimberly Moriarity."

"Sister?" Thick white brows knit.

"Yes. I am a member of the order whose college Vivian attended."

"Ah."

"This is quite a shock," Kim said with feeling.

He nodded as if between them they carried the weight of the world. He took her elbow and steered her to another room. An office.

"She worked here," Ellis said. "It seems only yesterday that I hired her."

"The Apeiron Foundation."

He nodded and then he scrutinized her again. "How did you learn of her death?"

Emtee Dempsey would have had a dozen ways of answering

that question which, if not lies in the estimation of the old nun, would have been guaranteed to convey to Ambrose Ellis that she had come here knowing Vivian Green was dead. Kim lacked this talent, if that was the right name for it.

"I came here expecting to find her alive."

His mouth opened and closed in silent anguish. "Oh my. You're not Professor Barry, are you?"

"No." Did he think she had lied? "But it is because of her I came. How long had Vivian been ill?"

"Ill? She wasn't ill at all. She was struck down by an automobile." A pause. "Why did you think she was ill?"

"Professor Barry said she sounded preoccupied. She had hoped to get together with Vivian, who was an old student, and was put off."

"And she sent you?" Clearly he found this strange. But Kim did not have to answer. A bell rang, very loudly, and hardly stopped before it began again. There was the quick sound of footsteps and the man who had let her in hurried by. The bell sounded a third time and then the door opened.

"It's about time," a male voice said impatiently. "Where is Ambrose?"

But he did not wait for an answer. Suddenly he was there

in the doorway, a man of perhaps thirty, open shirt, sport coat, bearded. His eyes darted from Ellis to Kim and back.

"Where is she?"

"James, you are understandably upset . . ."

"Upset! Is it true? I don't believe it. Where is she?"

Ambrose Ellis tried to take the younger man's arm, but he shook it free.

"What have you done to her?"

"Come with me. I'll take you to her."

Kim felt like a thing. James ignored her, Ellis did not introduce her. She went to the door and watched as Ellis took the visitor to the room where the urn was on display. James let out a cry, of rage, of despair, and then went into the room. In a moment there was the rending sound of his sobbing. Ellis turned around to find Kim watching, and his expression appealed for sympathy.

"I'm sorry. The poor fellow. I'll show you to the door, sister."

"Who is he?"

"James Parnell. An artist. One of the recipients of an Apeiron Fellowship. Vivian was always supportive of his applications. Not that he was a successful artist, but she almost took that as an endorsement."

"When will the funeral be?"

"I thought we would have a ceremony at the gravesite."

"But won't there be a Mass?"

He thought about it. "Perhaps she would have liked that."

"Isn't there any family?"

"Just myself."

"You're a relative?"

He looked at her almost suspiciously. "I am her husband." And then, as if trying the new formulation for the first time, "I was her husband. We married just a month ago."

3

The get-together Sister Mary Teresa had planned was not to be. When Kim returned, Katherine Senski was at the house on Walton Street, wearing a purple dress that represented an extravagant waste of material with folds and overlaps, and skirts under skirts, as if Katherine were emerging from a fabric telescope.

"That girl was dead even as we talked about her."

She sat across the desk from Emtee Dempsey in the book-lined study and spoke as if Kim should somehow have known.

"I have just seen the remains."

"Always expect the worst," Katherine cried enigmatically. "A cub reporter knows that and I forgot."

Emtee Dempsey said soothingly, "Why don't we let Sister Kimberly tell us what she has learned?"

The two old women listened attentively as Kim made her report, and the old nun's first reaction was to call the cathedral parish and make arrangements for a funeral Mass. "When? It may have to be tomorrow morning. Take down this address."

She hung up. "Now then, what did you learn from James Parnell?"

"Nothing. I left while he was still weeping beside the urn."

"With the husband looking on," Katherine murmured.

"He said she was struck down by a car, Katherine?"

"Hit and run. Two days ago. She wasn't found immediately."

"She hadn't been reported missing, had she?"

Katherine had the look of a student who can't think of an answer. "May I use your telephone?"

"To call the police? I suggest that we have sister call her brother Richard."

"I have contacts of my own," Katherine said with an edge to her voice.

"I know. But Richard is so helpful."

Kim said, "Maybe Katherine should call someone else."

"Nonsense. Richard would never forgive me."

That at least was true, though not in the sense the old nun intended. There was a friendly

enmity between her and Kim's brother Richard, a detective lieutenant in the Chicago police. He was always enraged by her intrusions into his work yet more often than not happy enough to take advantage of the wisdom Emtee Dempsey had gathered in over seven decades, from personal experience, from the vicarious experience she had derived from her study of history, and from over thirty years in the classroom.

Kim made the call in the kitchen, after telling Joyce of her visit.

"The wake was in the house? I didn't know that was done any more."

"There wasn't even going to be a funeral, Joyce."

Joyce made a face. "I can still see her playing soccer. If she lived the way she played, she must have been something."

Richard answered the phone, said just a minute, and then left it open for five minutes while unintelligible babble came through to her.

"What is it, Kim?" he said when he returned.

"One of Sister Mary Teresa's former students was killed in a hit and run, and she wondered if you knew anything about it."

"A hit and run," he said patiently. "Kim, I am in Homicide."

"Her name was Vivian Green and . . ."

"What! Do you mean Vivian Ellis?"

"We didn't know she was married until a few hours ago."

"Kim, how in the hell did she get mixed up in this one?"

"That's what she wants to tell you."

"Well put her on."

"She would appreciate it a lot if you could come here, Richard."

She held the phone away from her ear, then covered it with her hand lest Joyce be contaminated by Richard's ire. After a moment, she spoke into it.

"When can we expect you?"

"Within the hour."

Kim went back to the study with what Emtee Dempsey at least would consider good news. Ten minutes later Bridget Barry arrived and Kim had to tell her story again, and this was the most difficult time of all.

"Dead?" Bridget looked stunned. "But I talked to her only a few . . ."

"Sit down, Bridget. We will get to the bottom of this, you can depend upon that. Sister, have Sister Joyce put on tea. Katherine, will you have tea?"

"Not until after I have had a glass of sherry."

Emtee Dempsey nodded to Kim.

Bridget said, "If you have bourbon, bring me some of that."

It was not much more than

an hour later when, transferred to the living room, the posthumous get-together for Vivian Green took place. Richard was a bit weary with Mr. Rush, Kim thought, and vice versa, too. Perhaps there is some natural antagonism between lawmen and lawyers, though Mr. Rush had never defended a criminal. ("Other than myself," Emtee Dempsey would remind her.) Three elderly women, an elderly lawyer, and two Moriaritys, herself and Richard. Richard was drinking beer.

"The Apeiron Foundation," Mr. Rush repeated, putting down his scotch. It was in deference to his legendarily moderate drinking habits that Emtee Dempsey kept a good supply of beverages for the entertainment of guests. Rush took out a leather enclosed notebook and wrote it down. "Foundations report regularly to the secretary of state. I will have a check made on the . . ." He squinted at his note. "The Apeiron Foundation."

"The word means boundless," Emtee Dempsey said. "By extension, eternal."

Mr. Rush's mouth twisted in a little smile. "A modest ambition when setting up a foundation."

Bridget Barry said, "The idea was to promote artists whose works would last. Vivian explained it to me."

"The family must contain a classical scholar," Katherine said. She was seated next to Mr. Rush as usual, but the handsome widower seemed imperious to her charms.

"Or their lawyer is more learned than most."

"Ellis, the husband, mentioned her devotion to Professor Barry here," Richard said. "In fact, he says the accident occurred just as she was on her way to visit her."

"Had she bought a ticket?" Emtee Dempsey asked.

"She was going to buy it at Midway."

"Was the trip on the spur of the moment?"

Richard turned to Bridget Barry. "Had she told you she was coming to see you?"

"No. But I had often urged her to. She worked too hard. She hadn't had a real vacation in three years. But there was no need to fly to Florida. She knew I was in Chicago."

"A ruse?" Emtee Dempsey asked.

Katherine said, "I should have thought they'd still be on their honeymoon." She reached across Mr. Rush for an ashtray, but he swiftly handed it to her. She smiled at him as if the gesture were worth a million words.

"Look," Richard said, "I understand your curiosity. She went to the college. She remained a friend. Fine. But what

we have here is a hit and run. It is not in my jurisdiction. It is being investigated, and there has been the routine questioning of the family. That's it."

"Richard is perfectly correct," Emtee Dempsey said, as if stilling an uprising. "Until it is clear her death was a homicide, he and his colleagues will not conduct the necessary interviews. That leaves it up to us."

"No, it doesn't! Sister Mary Teresa, please. For once leave well enough alone. You have a book to write. You have prayers to say."

"Yes, and I must no doubt meet my maker soon. I do not wish to appear before Him with great sins of omission on my conscience. I do not for a minute believe Vivian Green died as the victim of an automobile accident. I hope the clothes she was wearing were sent to the lab."

Richard nodded, a picture of a man barely keeping control of himself. Kim sympathized with him; as his sister she knew how annoying to him Sister Mary Teresa's interventions must be. The trouble was, there always seemed to be an excuse. Vivian had been a student of the college, she was remembered by the old nun, and she was the friend of an esteemed former colleague, Bridget Barry. There was no way in the world Emtee Dempsey would rest un-

til she knew exactly what happened. But what she could not know, Kim was sure, was that Vivian Green's death was not accidental. Richard made the same point.

"What flight had she planned to take?"

Richard checked a piece of paper. "An eleven forty-five A.M. to Tampa/St. Petersburg."

"Exactly."

"Exactly what?"

"You said her body was found on Chase Avenue. It would be difficult to be farther from Midway and still be in Chicago. What was she doing there? When did her husband say she left the house?"

"She had less than an hour before the flight."

"And within that hour she thought she had time to detour to Chase Street, dismiss her cab—you will have to check on the cab, of course—and manage to be struck by an automobile. No, it was not an accident."

"Sister Mary Teresa," Richard said patiently. "Until and unless this is declared a homicide, it will be investigated as a hit and run. Which means we are looking for the driver of the car. We don't care what she was doing on Chase Street. For all we know, she changed her mind and decided not to go to Florida. She hadn't bought a ticket yet anyway. Maybe that was an excuse to get out of the house."

"Good! These are the avenues that have to be explored."

Richard rose, bowed exaggeratedly to Emtee Dempsey, and then directed a sweet smile around the group until he got to Kim and it faded. "Don't think it hasn't been nice."

"You've been immensely helpful, Richard, and we are grateful."

"I wish I hadn't come," he said with feeling.

4

Chase Street was in the neighborhood of Old Town but with none of the restored éclat of that area. The block on which Vivian had been struck was lined with cars on both sides, bumper to bumper almost, leaving only a narrow passageway for traffic. It seemed to Kim that a pedestrian in that narrow street would have nowhere easily to go if a car came along at great speed. To squeeze between the parked cars to the sidewalk would be difficult. The cars were so wedged together she wondered how an owner managed to pry his free. Maybe they were so relieved to have a parking space they never drove.

The street was one of store fronts, Chinese restaurants, a pizzeria, bars. The buildings were four or five stories high, with residential upper floors.

Kim could easily imagine someone in a hurry, someone with a plane to catch, dashing into the street and being trapped as a car rushed down on her. An accident? Why not? But what had brought her to this part of Chicago when she had so little time if she were to catch the plane to Florida? And why on earth would she go to Florida when she knew Bridget was in Chicago?

She was standing between a bar and an art goods store when someone hurried past, then stopped and turned. James Parnell.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"This is where it happened."

His bellicose manner dissolved, and Kim feared he was going to break down again. He nodded, his mouth a thin line.

"Did you come to see it, too?" she asked.

He began to nod, then changed his mind. "I live here."

"I see."

"I have a studio. Come on, I'll show it to you. What was your name again?"

"Kim. Sister Kimberly."

He glanced at her as they walked along. "What are you, Salvation Army or what?"

"I'm a nun."

"You're kidding. Vivvy went to school with the nuns."

"I know. She attended our college."

They had come to an entrance that led deep into a narrow, dark, and smelly hallway. "Hope your legs are good. I'm at the top."

The stairs were no better than the hall, but when they reached the top they came into a huge undivided room lit by an enormous skylight. It was the very picture of the artist's studio.

"What a magnificent place."

"Do you drink coffee?"

"Please."

There was a bed at one end of the room and a makeshift kitchen, but the rest was devoted to the studio's reason for being. There was a canvas on an easel that had been covered with a primer. Stacked against the walls were paintings.

How to describe them? There was something of Goya in them, a combination of realism and fancy, a figure floating above a room where two others spoke. But her eye was caught by a very large, very straightforward portrait.

"Isn't that Vivian?"

"In the flesh."

No exaggeration there, God knew. But there was a kind of modest defiance in her nudity that gave Kim a sense of the woman in the way the photo in the shrine at the Apeiron Foundation had not.

"She modeled for you?"

He handed her a cup of coffee

and looked her in the eye. "We were in love."

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened!"

Kim sipped her coffee. She had to press the matter or Emtee Dempsey would never forgive her. "But she married Ambrose Ellis."

"Yes, she did," he said furiously. He drew back his hand as if he meant to dash his coffee on the canvas with Vivian's picture. Kim put a hand on his arm.

"Don't."

He looked at her. "I couldn't." He inspected the picture. "It is a very good likeness. Portraiture is not my gift. Look at this one of Pilar. Awful. But I was inspired this once. And there is much more than her surface here." A look of anguish came over him. "I wanted her to quit work, come here, live with me."

Before or after her marriage to Ambrose? But James had turned to her again.

"I killed her."

He said it calmly and, Kim thought, with a certain relief. Suddenly the studio no longer seemed as capacious as it had. She thought of the long dark hallway and all those stairs they had climbed. Now here she was alone with a very upset man who said he had killed Vivian.

"You were driving the car?"

"No. I don't even have a car.

She was convinced that one day I would be famous and rich. Maybe after I'm dead. Right now I don't own a bicycle."

"She was killed by a car."

"Yes. And right below in that street. Why was she there?"

"She had come to see you?"

He laughed a bitter laugh. "Sure. Because I had made the ultimate appeal. I told her I was going to kill myself. That is why she came. That is why she was in the street when some maniac came along and killed her." He gave her a haunted look. "And I didn't know she had come. I thought she recognized my bluff and went off to Florida as she said she would, to get away from me. And she was lying down there dead, under a car, undiscovered."

5

The services for Vivian Green were held in the little chapel in the house on Walton Street. A father in California could not come. He was institutionalized and past feeling any grief at the loss of his daughter, if he even remembered he had one. It was the saddest funeral Kim had ever seen, yet it could have been worse. It might not have happened at all. Ambrose Ellis sat uncomfortably in a front pew with a much madeup middle-aged woman he had iden-

tified as his sister. The little man who had answered the door at the Apeiron Foundation stood in the back. Obviously none of them was Catholic. Bridget Barry and Katherine and Florence Dodge, president of Vivian's class, sat together, while Emtee Dempsey, Joyce, and Kim knelt together. Father Foy said the Mass of the Angels, a liturgy full of the joy of resurrection, but Kim felt a powerful urge to weep. She wondered if Ambrose Ellis had told the artist, James Parnell, of the service. His grief when he went into that little shrine containing her ashes had been genuine.

The urn stood on a table in the aisle of the chapel. From time to time, Ambrose Ellis would turn to look at it, almost in disbelief. Vivian had been his wife for a month and now she was dead.

After the memorial service, Ambrose Ellis said how grateful he was to Kim and her colleagues for the wonderful service. "Both Pilar and I were deeply moved. My sister and I are not of your faith, but Vivian would have wanted such a service."

Kim said, "I went to Chase Street where it happened and ran into James Parnell."

"Poor James. Did you talk? He was in love with Vivian, you know. At least he thought he

was. He had convinced himself they were meant to play out some grand and tragic passion together. It was quite embarrassing to Vivian and not a little annoying to me."

"It continued after you married Vivian?"

"James as an artist cannot recognize marriage as an impediment to his appetites." He smiled. "One thing is certain, however. He has undeniable talent. Even genius. For that we forgave him much."

"Why would Vivian have been there when she had to catch a plane?"

"I am guessing of course, but he must have threatened suicide again."

"Again?"

"Life without her was meaningless, he had no reason to go on." Ambrose's voice became theatrical. But then a profoundly sad expression came over his face. "But it was her he killed, wasn't it? Now he must live with that. As for me, I am grateful for the little month we had."

Kim was assailed by thoughts of the nude Vivian in James's studio. And she had been on her way to Florida, a separate vacation after a month of marriage. It would take an Emtee Dempsey to probe beneath the surface of Ambrose Ellis. But the old nun led Bridget Barry down the hall to her study, com-

forting her grieving former colleague.

6

Mr. Rush did not wish to comment one way or another on the facts about the Apeiron Foundation he had discovered.

"Perhaps they speak for themselves. What is simply factual is that the initial endowment of some eighty million had dwindled over the past three years to less than twenty. This means that capital was being disbursed and not merely interest on capital, in itself an extraordinary procedure for a foundation of this kind. Not illegal, precisely, but perhaps not within the constituting documents of the Apeiron Foundation, either."

"Who did set it up?" Emtee Dempsey asked. She and the lawyer and Kim were in the old nun's study. Rush had telephoned to say he would like to drop by to pass on what he had learned of the foundation for which Vivian had worked.

"Mr. Ellis. The father of Ambrose and Pilar. With a quite well defined purpose of supporting the arts. The brother and sister, together with some aged relatives, constitute the board."

"To whom had the money gone?"

Mr. Rush nodded in approval of the question. "The lion's share has been going to an entity called Video Beat, whose professed purpose is to elevate the musical taste of the nation's youth by producing video cassettes which will merge the modern and the classical."

"Video Beat. Who runs it?"

"Here is where things get slightly incestuous. Ambrose Ellis is president, but a flamboyant fellow named Sancho O'Neil is the actual manager. It is a nonprofit company. In every sense of the term. To say it has been a flop would be kind. It has been devouring Apeiron money, and Ambrose's reaction, egged on by Sancho O'Neil, is to pour in more money. A classical case. The gambler who thinks one more bet will right the scales, the investor who thinks if he can float one more loan he will recoup his losses. Clearly, to continue along this route will shortly drain the foundation of funds."

"And Ambrose has the right to do that if he wishes?"

"If he has the backing of the board."

"And he does?"

Mr. Rush had the look of a man about to play the forgotten trump. "A week ago an action was filed by Pilar Ellis and Mrs. Ambrose Ellis, on behalf of the foundation, asking the court to restrain Ambrose from dispens-

ing any more funds and demanding his resignation as director."

"Mr. Rush, I congratulate you. This is important information indeed. What is the present status of the suit?"

"A restraining order has been issued. Ambrose's hands have been legally tied for some days now."

"How many days?"

"Four."

"The day Vivian left for Florida. Is the foundation simply immobilized?"

"Pilar Ellis in consultation with the court will administer the foundation in the interim."

Sister Mary Teresa brought the fingers of her pudgy little hands together in an attitude of prayer. She must have been reviewing what Kim had told her of her earlier conversation with Ambrose. In any case, after a moment of silence, the old nun said, "I think I should like to have a talk with Ambrose Ellis."

"Not while I am present," Mr. Rush said, getting to his feet. Such was his admiration for the old nun that he seemed to think that all she had to do was express a wish to have it fulfilled. Kim knew otherwise.

"Sister Kimberly?"

"What could I possibly tell him that would induce him to come?"

"Tell him how much I regret

that we saw one another on so sad an occasion when I had no chance to talk with him. I would like to repair the omission."

That at least had the semblance of truth about it. Perhaps it would be too much to say that she would lie while telling the truth, but she could certainly mislead. Once in answer to the question whether she had read all the books in her library, Emtee Dempsey had boldly replied, "I have read every word in every one of them."

Kim objected, later, if only because new books had been added that very week. Not that she believed the old nun had accomplished what she claimed with the others. Of course she had an explanation. "Sister Kimberly, when I do read those new books I doubt that I shall encounter a word I have not already read." Devious of course. But Kim did not doubt Sister Mary Teresa's current desire to have a talk with Ambrose Ellis.

But after Mr. Rush left and before she could set out unwillingly to the address of the Apeiron Foundation, a call came from Richard.

"Kim, I am going to say this only once, but I mean it. I am holding you responsible if Emtee Dempsey interferes in this case. Understand? You are responsible!"

"Richard, in the first place,

that is ridiculous. She is my superior, not the reverse. Second, what case are you talking about?"

He sighed into the phone. "The death of Vivian Ellis."

"Have you been transferred to hit and run?"

"It has been ruled a homicide."

"Why?"

"We located the car that hit her."

"Who does it belong to?"

"Ciudad Dos, the rental agency. It was rented by someone connected with the Apeiron Foundation, and on the face of it things look odd. But we don't want to make a lot of noise, and above all I don't want you-know-who stirring up things."

"Who rented the car?"

"An artist who had been supported by the foundation. James Parnell."

"But that's impossible!"

"Do you know him?"

"I talked with him, Richard, he loved her. He wouldn't have done anything to harm her."

"Maybe you can testify for him in court."

"Richard, there has to be a mistake."

"The only mistake you have to worry about is your getting mixed up in this any further."

The phone went dead. Kim hung up, looked toward the study and then toward the kitchen. But she decided on the

chapel where she could sit in silence and ask what was going on. This was where Vivian's ashes had been blessed and her soul commended to God's mercy. What circumstances had surrounded her death? She had been married a month; she was loved by James Parnell and had posed for him; she was engaged in a legal action against her husband in conjunction with his sister. And now the police thought James had driven the car that killed her. In circumstances as strange to her as these, who was Kim to say he could not have done it. She would not have given Richard the satisfaction of telling him that she knew instinctively that James was innocent. But it was true.

It was the thought of Pilar Ellis that seemed to be the light she sought. She would go to Pilar first and then see what she could do about fulfilling the commission Emtee Dempsey had given her. Who but the old nun would regard it as routine that she summon a man like Ambrose Ellis to appear before her? Knowing what they now knew about him, they had to realize he might be less than eager to discuss either business or personal matters with virtual strangers.

Pilar said that of course she remembered Kim and would be happy to see her. Come right

away if she could.

The address was on the North Shore, and there seemed to be a platoon of uniformed attendants to open the door, to call upstairs, to operate the elevator taking her to the uppermost floor from which Pilar Ellis looked out westward onto the lake and southward to the loop.

"I love Chicago," she said, spreading her arms as if to embrace it. She wore a many-colored caftan that made her seem a priestess asking a benediction.

"James Parnell has been arrested," Kim said. "He is accused of driving the car that killed Vivian." It seemed important not to let Pilar write the script for this meeting.

"James! What nonsense." Pilar had turned in a swirl of caftan. "I will tell you a secret."

"He loved Vivian?"

Pilar crossed the room and looked levelly at Kim, apparently deciding she was not a religious fanatic to be treated aloofly. "Please sit down. I am going to smoke. I presume you do not?"

Kim shook her head.

Having enveloped herself in clouds of cigarette smoke, Pilar said, "At the lovely ceremony you arranged at your house on Walton Street, I could not help but think how naive those are who act on a pious impulse. You assumed you were comforting a grieving husband. You have

learned that James loved Vivian. Don't ask me why. These things never do make sense. There is good reason to think Vivian was fleeing to him on the pretense of going to Florida. It is a matter of great convenience for Ambrose that Vivian is dead."

"Because of the restraining order?"

Again Pilar looked at Kim more closely. "How do you happen to know of that? Not that it is a private matter."

"It came up when we were looking into the circumstances surrounding Vivian's death."

"Looking into? Do you mean, investigating?"

"Sister Mary Teresa wants to know how and why Vivian died."

"How? She was struck by a car. Why?" Pilar smiled as smoke rolled from her mouth. "I found her an extremely difficult young woman to understand. Why, for example, did she marry Ambrose?"

"I wanted to ask you that."

"I don't know why. Maybe every marriage resides on similar irrationality."

"Was it sudden?"

"I could not have been more surprised if she had married the doorman."

"Yet subsequently she joined with you in a lawsuit against her husband?"

"In the interest of the foundation."

"Where has all the money gone?"

"How much do you know?"

Kim gave a condensed version of what Mr. Rush had told Emtee Dempsey. For the third time Pilar was visibly impressed.

"Again, all that is in the public domain, but it is remarkable that you should have thought to look for it."

"Did Video Beat consume over fifty million in capital in three years?"

"Make it sixty. It did indeed, and were like to need sixty more if it prove fair weather. The so-called entertainment industry has an insatiable maw. Millions mean nothing. We have always been wealthy, Ambrose and I, but the foundation is a small one as foundations go. He was well over his head the first month of his great adventure, and he could not find the wisdom or the courage to admit he had made a mistake. Aided and abetted by one Sancho O'Neil, I might add."

"Where exactly did the money go?"

"Producers, musicians, distributors, duplicators, on and on. Oh, the bookkeeping was beyond reproach. Every ill-spent dollar is exquisitely accounted for. I tried logic, I tried pleading, finally I tried the law. So far that has been working. Ambrose will never forgive me. He

insists he is on the verge of recouping all that has been invested and more, much more, besides. He apparently has learned nothing. He still thinks he has found a veritable gold mine."

"Aren't the films any good?"

"They are marvelous. They are not unpleasant to watch. Alas, they do not appeal to the one group on which success depends. Sub-teenagers. Imagine that. Ambrose put himself in thrall to children."

"Sister Mary Teresa wants to talk to Ambrose."

"A modest ambition."

"She never accepted Vivian's death as accidental. Now the police do not. Do you have any idea who might have killed her?"

Pilar leaned forward, shook her arm free in the massive sleeve, and crushed out her cigarette. "I can only eliminate people. It surely was not James. It just as surely was not Ambrose."

"Why not? Wasn't he angry with her for joining with you in the lawsuit?"

"He was furious, in his way. But he was so delighted with himself at having married Vivian he would certainly not have turned around and killed her. Besides, driving a car requires a physical coordination of which Ambrose is incapable. Nor did I kill her, incidentally.

We had become allies, for one thing. For another, I would be incapable of such a deed."

"Sancho O'Neil."

She laughed. "Have you met him?"

"No."

"When you have, remember my reaction to your question."

"Is there anyone else?"

"Ames, who answers the door. Of course, there is always the possibility that what appears to have happened happened. Some careless fool ran into her and then drove away in panic. Imagine him, or her, waiting for a news story on what they had done."

"I visited James's studio."

"Did you really? I think he has real talent. He owes our support of him to Vivian as much as anyone. She recognized what he had before Ambrose and I did. That is one of his paintings."

Kim had noticed it, a huge canvas opposite the windows opening to the east, yellows but carmine and umber as well, a scene emerging through a pastel fog, as of an advancing crowd about to break into the clear. There was a menace in the picture.

"Does it have a name?"

"*The Emerging Crowd.*"

Approaching the painting, Kim noticed a pot almost concealed by the pulled drape. It reminded her of the urn she had

seen at the Apeiron Foundation.

"I gave him thirty thousand dollars for it. His largest fee to date."

Then why did he continue to live where he did? But Kim, remembering the spacious studio, thought she understood. What does success do to artists, if not enable them to afford the things that dull their talent? But James had described himself as poor, unable to afford even a bike.

Apparently he had rented a car and run down the woman he loved. Kim did not want to believe that. She could not believe it. But how could she show it was false?

7

"By producing the one who did it," Emtee Dempsey answered. "It is always the only way. I do not say I share your conviction he is innocent, but neither am I convinced he is guilty."

"And who do you think might have done it?"

"Might have done it? Sister Kimberly, you or I might have done it. That is too large a category." She paused. "Am I to have a chance to talk with Ambrose Ellis?"

"He has agreed to come here tonight."

"Sister, you are a marvel."

Pilar had called her brother before Kim left the apartment.

"Ambrose," she drawled, "Sister Kimberly, the pretty young woman with the red hair at Walton Street yesterday, is with me. She had the notion I might intercede for her with you. I explained our situation but am taking this chance anyway. I think we owe them something for the trouble they went to."

Her expression did not match the easy confidence of her words. When she had finished speaking, she winced and closed her eyes, listening. Her eyes opened and she gave Kim a look of exaggerated surprise and handed her the phone.

"Mr. Ellis?"

"You have a favor to ask?"

"Not for myself. Sister Mary Teresa, our superior, would so much like to speak with you and thought it inappropriate in the circumstances in which you first met. Could you come see her on Walton Street?"

"It would be a consolation, my dear, to talk with others who knew Vivian, particularly those who knew her when I did not."

"If you could come tonight . . ."

"At what time?"

"Eight o'clock?"

"Eight thirty."

That easily it was done. But Kim did not regret having gone

to Pilar first. In the meantime, she would go downtown and visit James Parnell.

Identifying herself as Richard's sister did wonders, although she felt guilty about it, but soon she was looking at James Parnell through a cloudy glass, a phone to her ear.

"They think I did it." His voice was that of someone still stunned.

"They say you rented a car."

"Someone using a credit card of mine did."

"Was the card stolen?"

"I didn't give it to anyone. I've been thinking and I'm sure I didn't. My driver's license is missing, too. Anyone can just walk into my studio, you saw that. I figured those five flights of stairs are the best security I'll ever have."

"Did you tell the police that?"

"Sure. It got a big laugh." He leaned toward her. "This is like seeing someone through stained glass. I'd like to paint you."

"I saw the picture Pilar bought."

"The portrait I did of her?"

"No. *The Emerging Crowd*."

He shrugged deprecatingly. "My yellow period. When I should have killed myself and didn't."

"Don't say that."

"It was bad when Vivian married Ambrose. I never had a good conversation with her after that. But at least she was

somewhere, even if she wasn't with me. Now she's nowhere."

"That's not true."

He leaned forward again.

"You believe all that?"

"I believe all that."

"I wish I did."

"Say your prayers." Kim smiled. "That is Pascal's advice, not mine."

"It sounds like my mother."

"Is she alive?"

"She just left. With my father. I'm not sure they believed me, so what can I expect of the police?"

"James, who killed her? You didn't. Someone did. Who?"

"My God, I don't know."

"It's the only way to get you out of here."

He didn't know and wasn't good at imagining anyone killing Vivian. Ambrose? Why? Same with Pilar. Who else was there?

"James, do you know Sancho O'Neil?"

"Sancho." An almost tender smile came over James's face. "What a guy. He's spaced out on Cloud 9 half the time. Knows more about music than anyone I know, all kinds of music. Went to Eastman, went to Juilliard. A genius. His problem is he can't take himself seriously. Vivian cut him off, but he landed on his feet with Video Beat."

"Do you know how much money that effort has lost?"

"Lots. Sancho was playing

with millions. He loved it. I saw several of his videos, MTV sorts of thing. Listen, in any genre genius can shine. They were marvelous."

"But they were losing money. Millions."

"Yeah." Again that tender smile as if commercial failure was a guarantee of the worth of what Sancho had done.

"But the point of Video Beat was to attract the young."

"The young?" James shook his head. "An artist doesn't aim. He makes and usually has to wait."

"Like you?"

"I'm young."

"James, didn't Pilar give you a large sum of money for that painting?"

He nodded. "I lent it to Sancho. He had a cash problem."

"A cash problem! But he got millions from the Apeiron Foundation."

"Kim, I've got to get out of here."

"That's what we're talking about. Give me a suspect."

He looked at her through that murky window for a full minute, then shook his head. "I can't. To get out of here I'd blame my mother, but I know she didn't do it. What's the point of kidding myself? A stolen credit card. A driver's license with a picture of me in my hippie phase, hair to my shoulders. I may be laugh-

ing over this for years."

Kim reported this to Sister Mary Teresa and realized how tired she was. She had spent the day running around, to no purpose. And Ambrose would be coming after supper.

"Go take a nap, sister. You deserve it."

"For wasting the day? Sister, you should see him there in jail. It's like caging a bird. How can I just go up and take a nap?"

"Because I will be putting my mind to it in the meantime. You may have found out more than you realize."

"What?"

A little pudgy finger wagged. "Go take your nap."

It was a soothing thought that she had unwittingly told Emtee Dempsey something the old nun could use as a key to decode this confusing set of events. Kim only wished that she believed it.

Kim answered the door that night at eight forty to find Ambrose Ellis and another, younger man on the doorstep.

"I have brought along a colleague, sister. I hope that's all right."

"Of course. Sister Mary Teresa asked some others, too."

"Oh? This is Sancho O'Neil." He added, after a pause, "The musician."

O'Neil was of middle height, boneless, a huge smile, and

eyes that were enlarged comically by extremely thick glasses. His clothes appeared to be draped on him and he moved to some inaudible music, though there were no headphones visible.

"Had to come, had to come. A convent? Man. Take five." He showed her his palm and Kim obligingly laid her hand on his. He paid no attention, looking around once they were inside. Kim led them down the hall, hoping Joyce had been listening from the kitchen. Sister Mary Teresa would get quite a kick out of Sancho O'Neil. And vice versa.

Awaiting them in the living room, besides Richard and Mr. Rush, were Pilar, Katherine, Bridget Barry, and their hostess.

"Ah," Emtee Dempsey said, quieting the room and extending her hand to Ambrose. "Our guest of honor." Her gaze turned to the mobile man beside him. "And this would be Sancho O'Neil."

"The same, milady. The very same." He took the old nun's hand and would have brought it to his lips if she had not prevented it. Instead she levered herself to her feet with the musician's assistance and introduced Ambrose to others in the room. Kim noticed Richard's interest in Sancho O'Neil, and after she asked what the two

new arrivals would like and headed for the kitchen Richard came with her.

"Did she invite that hophead O'Neil?"

"You know him?"

"Every narc in Illinois knows him. Wherever he is, dangerous substances are found, but the most he has ever been up for is possession of marijuana. Let me make a call. I'll go in the study."

"Sancho O'Neil," Joyce said, excited. "Have you heard his music?"

"Joyce, I've scarcely even heard his name before."

"He is a biggie, I'll tell you that. Everyone expects him to do great things."

Sancho O'Neil seemed to be many things indeed. Kim took him the tomato juice he had asked for and gave Ambrose a scotch on the rocks.

Ambrose looked at Kim reproachfully. "You led me to understand she wanted a tête-à-tête with me. This is a party!"

"Things got out of hand."

"How long do you intend to keep James Parnell locked up?" Pilar demanded of Richard Moriarity. "He is no more guilty of killing Vivian than I am."

"He rented the car that killed her."

"Some clerk identified him?"

"It was his credit card and it was his signature. He had to use a driver's license which

would have had his picture."

"The signature was a forgery," Pilar said contemptuously. "When did you last use your driver's license for identification, lieutenant? No one looks at the photograph."

"Who would do such a thing?" Emtee Dempsey asked.

Pilar seemed about to say but decided against it. With a bejeweled hand, she held her full skirt and crossed her legs, bringing her glass to her mouth at the same time. She might have been acting on a dare—but not Emtee Dempsey's.

"The name she'd like to give is mine," Ambrose Ellis said in his sepulchral voice. "She thinks I have been a bad steward of the foundation."

"The court seems to agree with her," Mr. Rush said.

Ambrose nodded. "That is true. But I shall confound my enemies. And my sister."

"With Video Beat?" Katherine asked.

"With Video Beat. I only regret that Vivian did not live to see my vindication."

"Where is she interred?" Sister Mary Teresa asked.

"Sister, I must thank you for the wonderfully consoling memorial service you arranged here. It is exactly what Vivian would have wanted."

"She is enshrined, not interred," Pilar said.

"What was the name of the

clergyman who conducted the service?" Ambrose said.

But Emtee Dempsey ignored him. "What do you mean, enshrined?" she asked Pilar.

Ambrose said, "Sister Kimberly can describe the room to you. At the foundation. I cannot bear separation from her. Not yet."

"Mr. O'Neil," the old nun said, dismissing the subject, "tell us about your musical project. Video Beat."

And in half-intelligible half sentences accompanied by a hundred reiterations of "You know" and "Man," the spacy musician described his plan to merge the current interests of kids with the musical classics.

It was a virtuoso performance and during it, Emtee Dempsey beckoned Richard to her, they whispered for a minute, and then Richard withdrew. And Sancho O'Neil spoke on.

"It is an absurdity," Pilar said, when the musician paused for breath.

"Everyone who has watched the videos agree they are excellently done," Ambrose said.

"And the Edsel was a well made car. I only hope the foundation can recover from your act of faith."

"You don't object to discussing your differences?" Emtee Dempsey asked Ambrose and Pilar.

"My dear lady," Ambrose said, "they have been bruited about a courtroom. We have no secrets. I have been accused of incompetence and theft and everything else. 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth . . .'"

He rolled his eyes to the ceiling and held out his empty glass. Kim collected it and others and took them to the kitchen for refills.

"Richard left," Joyce said.

"I noticed."

"He said he would be back."

And so he was, an hour later. He did not sit down, and when the old nun turned to him, he became the focus of attention.

"Well, Richard Moriarity?"

"Ellis, you're under arrest. Would you like your rights explained?"

"Under arrest!" He looked around. "Is this a convent parlor game?"

"We've taken possession of the urn, Ellis. Let's go."

"Richard," Emtee Dempsey said. "Be fair and tell us what you have found."

"You took Vivian's ashes!" Ambrose fell back in his chair as if wounded.

"With a court order," Richard said.

"Is nothing sacred?"

"You can't keep human remains like that, Ellis. It's against the law."

"But I was told . . ."

"Did you open the urn?"

Emtee Dempsey asked.
"Just to verify the contents."
"And they were ashes?" the old nun asked.

Kim realized that everyone hung on Richard's answer. Ambrose looked at Richard with apprehensive dread, Sancho emerged from a cloud of smoke, leaning forward, and Mr. Rush and Katherine were motionless in expectation.

Pilar broke the silence. "What did you find, lieutenant?"

"Ashes."

Sancho became agitated and moved toward Ambrose.

"What's going on, man?"

"Of course you found ashes," Ambrose said. "That is what the urn is for." His eyes drifted toward Pilar, who met his questioning glance with defiance.

"I don't like this," Sancho said.

"Do be quiet," Ambrose suggested to his protégé.

"What don't you like, Mr. O'Neil?" Emtee Dempsey asked. "Are you surprised that the urn contained ashes?"

"Why should he be!" Ellis demanded, but there was an odd anguish in his voice.

"And what of you, Pilar?" the old nun asked. "Are you surprised?"

"That Ambrose wished to keep Vivian's ashes near him? Not at all. They were very devoted."

"And what will be found in

the urn in your apartment, Pilar?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Sister Kimberly," Emtee Dempsey said.

"The urn behind the drape in your living room. It is identical to the one I saw at the Apeiron Foundation."

"Because you bought it from the same funeral home," the old nun said. "McDivitt's."

"Another urn?" Ambrose cried. "Lieutenant Moriarity, I suggest you get a court order and confiscate that one."

"I did."

"You did!"

Emtee Dempsey said, "Perhaps you would like to tell us what that one contained, Ambrose?"

There was something pathetic in Pilar's attempt to dash from the room. Richard moved and stood athwart her path and she came to a stop, wheeled, and looked at Kim with hatred. "This is your doing!" And she swooped toward Kim, hands outstretched, her long nails descending. But Richard caught her arm and held her. She screamed in rage, but the voice of the old nun was quite audible.

"Don't leave now, Mr. O'Neil."

Sancho O'Neil was almost to the door and now broke into a run. But Gleason and O'Connell had been stationed by the front

door and soon brought him back, writhing and cursing.

"What have you done to us, Pilar?" Ambrose asked sorrowfully.

"Done?" Sancho cried. "She doublecrossed us, man, that's what."

"What is in the other urn, Richard?" Katherine asked.

He had gotten handcuffs on Pilar with a struggle. "Cocaine. A very valuable amount of cocaine."

Ambrose sighed and brought the back of his hand to his forehead. "I was trying to recoup the money Sancho had lost. Just this once . . ." And he began unconvincingly to weep.

"Pilar," Emtee Dempsey said. "You killed Vivian, didn't you?"

The handsome woman looked at the old nun with venom and then at Kim. She might have been a beautiful, captured beast, something feline.

"Yes! Yes, I did!"

"You fool," Ambrose said. "You fool."

"You have all been very foolish," the old nun said. "But Pilar has been more than foolish."

Mr. Rush left after Richard and his companions had taken away the three culprits. But Katherine wanted a postmortem, and Emtee Dempsey was happy enough to accommodate her. Kim's seeing the urn in

Pilar's apartment was crucial, of course, but another item had been equally decisive.

"The other portrait in James Parnell's studio. It was of Pilar. The thought occurred to me that she was as enamored of the artist as he was of Vivian."

"Which would make her jealous?"

"Of course. She thought she had overcome the rivalry when Vivian married her brother. But it was clear that James Parnell still loved Vivian. By using his credit card when she rented the car, Pilar was avenging herself on Parnell, too. Both it and his driver's license are made out to J. A. Parnell. Even so, it was a risk for her to assume the clerk would try to match her with the photograph."

"James's hair was as long as hers in the picture," Kim said.

Bridget Barry shook her head. "I can't believe she married that man. She had come to despise him."

"I think we will find that pressure was put upon her."

"Oh, the poor thing," Bridget said.

Poor thing indeed. Ambrose, in an effort to distance himself from Pilar, sang like a bird, in Richard's phrase. Vivian had been made to believe she was legally involved in the financial troubles of the foundation,

and Ambrose had proposed marriage so they could not be called to testify against one another.

Since backing Sancho had gotten him into trouble, Ambrose thought he might get him out of trouble, too. Of course Sancho knew how to get rich quick—if you already had money, that is. Ambrose actually thought of the cocaine as a business investment. Pilar, who had allowed herself to be drawn into the cocaine solution to Apeiron's problems, was driven over the edge by Parnell's continuing infatuation with Vivian. That was why she had followed her on the fateful day and attempted to destroy both her beloved and his beloved with one deed.

"What was her point in doublecrossing Ambrose and Sancho?" Katherine wanted to know.

The old nun looked thoughtful. "Who can plumb the depths of another soul? She ran down Vivian like an animal and tried to place the blame for it on

James Parnell, but at the same time she was appalled by the use of drugs in our society. Momentarily she could be tempted by the thought of enormous profits from selling the cocaine, but then she thought of the buyers and could not do it."

Some days later they interred Vivian Green's ashes with the hope that now she would be allowed to rest in peace. Afterward they adjourned to the house on Walton Street.

"Poor Vivian, to have been caught up with such people," Bridget said.

"Imagine having been wealthy all one's life and seeing money draining away like that," Emtee Dempsey said. "It made them all desperate."

"Don't forget the love interest," Katherine said.

"I rely on you to remember."

"Who gets the coke?" Joyce asked.

"You do," Emtee Dempsey said sternly. Katherine gasped but the old nun added, "Unless Katherine would prefer a white wine, that is."

UNSOLVED

by
Lawrence Treat

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the April issue.

On Walpurgis night Julia, who had considerable witchery in her, woke Julius at three A.M. and kissed him gently. Julius, who was in a foul mood at having his sleep interrupted, said testily, "What did you wake me up for?"

"Because you reminded me of my brother and the time we got up from our tent, and, without even eating breakfast, started walking. We walked due south for three miles and—"

"How did you know it was due south?"

"Pure instinct, and please stop interrupting me." She waited for Julius to make a gesture of assent, although she couldn't see him in the dark. "Then," she said, "we turned and walked three miles due west. By that time my brother was tired of carrying the gun, so he gave it to me and we walked three miles due north and found a bear eating the rest of our breakfast."

"I thought you said you didn't have any breakfast."

"That was the day before, and besides, you know I never eat breakfast. Anyhow, I killed the bear with one single shot. What color was the bear?"

Julius said, "You have no brother and never did," and he went back to sleep. But in the morning he woke up in a mood of pleasantry and answered the question about the bear.

What did he say and why?

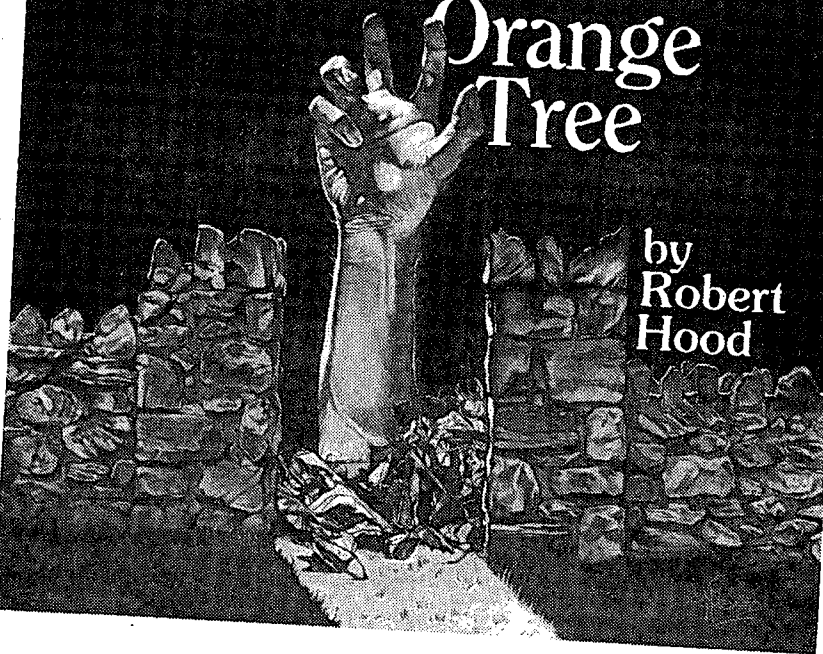
See page 149 for the solution to the February puzzle.

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FICTION

Peripheral Movement in the Leaves Under an Orange Tree

by
Robert
Hood



I've looked after my garden for forty years, and I've never been frightened of anything in it, including a black snake I once found under the woodpile. But those days are past; I'm even scared to go down the stairs now, let alone to rake up the leaves. There's something weird among the trees.

You think I'm going senile, don't you? Back to childhood. Wouldn't blame you if you did. I remember lying in my room, afraid of the dark; watching goblins moulded from shadow skittering through the night. This isn't much different; 'cept now, as an adult,

Illustration by Thomas Fleming

I don't believe in goblins. Problem is, I can't convince myself they're not real, and it makes their presence even more fearsome.

I've thought about this a lot—after all, I don't go out into the garden any more and it gives me time to brood. What I think is, it started with a nightmare . . . But perhaps I shouldn't tell you about the nightmare. You'll reckon the whole thing's in my head. My wife, Elise, used to say there's plenty of weird things in there already, and that was before all this stuff started.

You want to know what's happening? Well, last month, on a Tuesday, was the first time I actually pinpointed the thing that's been worrying me—I was getting this sense of presence, a sensation that the garden wasn't empty. I couldn't quite put my finger on it; I put it down to frayed nerves, loneliness—that stuff old people are supposed to suffer from when they're stuck in a house by themselves. You social workers know all about it, eh? Well, I fought the feeling, 'cause that garden's all I've got left and I didn't want the memory spoilt by some emotional phantom, you know. I went out as always, pottered around, pruning the roses, gathering up the leaves—autumn business, necessary now the weather's cooling toward winter. I've always gotten a lot of pleasure out of raking up the leaves; their colors are so varied and they crinkle into patterns as you draw the prongs through them. I usually dump some of them under the trees; later I spread them about to form mulch. But most I use as kindling—I put them in crates in the laundry to dry out and usually end up with bags and bags of the stuff, ready for a cold night.

This particular morning I went out raking, and there seemed to be a lot of leaves on the ground, especially as I'd raked the day before yesterday and as far as I was aware there hadn't been a wind-storm overnight. I didn't take much more than fleeting notice of this. Why should I? But the biggest pile was under the old orange tree near the back gate. Its branches spread low and wide, and at this time of the year the tree was full of yellowy-green oranges waiting for the first frost of winter so I could pick them nice and sweet. I noticed the loose leaves seemed to concentrate under the orange tree—odd really, 'cause it wasn't dropping its leaves or anything. The leaves were from deciduous trees I've got cluttering up the place—dozens of them, some older than me. Liquid ambers, an elm, several jacarandas, a beech, maples, the inevitable willow; they give a real nice carpet of color. The leaves must have been blown under the orange tree, I figured. I'd been dumping compost, sure, but not that much.

I bent down under its branches—and something moved. There was one of those crackly slithers you often get among drying vegetation—lizards disturbed by your shadow passing over them—but this was a big one. I fetched a stick and poked the leaves; they rippled with a quick movement and fell still and silent. When I'd scattered them, there was nothing there 'cept the earth.

I scrambled out from under the tree—feeling rather nervous, I might tell you—and went about my raking. I got together a big pile, fetched my barrow, and shoveled the leaves into it; then I wheeled them into the laundry. The door was open and there were leaves all over the floor. "Damn!" I cursed, thinking some kid or a cat had been in and messed everything up. But when I looked in the crate I'd filled with leaves the day before yesterday, I found it was almost empty.

Well, it explained the leaves in the yard; but who'd do a thing like that? I admit for a moment I doubted myself, thinking I'd maybe dreamed raking up the leaves. The brain doesn't improve as old age overtakes it . . . gets worse all the time. But no! I distinctly remembered raking up leaves and filling the crate. I still had a scrape on my knuckles where I'd knocked them against the crate edge. Obviously someone was out to annoy me.

All that day I was distracted by movement in the underbrush, as though tiny creatures were following me around. Leaves would twitch suddenly, on the periphery of my vision; I'd think I'd seen something, but when I looked full on, there was nothing. As I said, I was already feeling uneasy about the yard; this niggling movement was making it worse. I finally went inside early. I'd had enough by the time afternoon shadows were deepening around me.

Next day the leaves I'd put in the crate were spread out over the yard again.

Now, I'm a pretty mild man; I don't get much agitated, except when government ministers appear on the telly, justifying their cuts to pensions with gobbledygook about a general downturn and stuff like that. But this leaf business was annoying me quite a bit; I suppose I was feeling that my sanctuary was being violated. They tried to take my home away from me a while back, did you know that? The estate agents, this is. Sent some bloke around to inform me I had to get out. Latish one night. I told *him* to get out, let me tell you. "Piss off!" I said. I followed him down the street just to make sure he did.

Bloody neighbors probably put them up to it; they resent me, always interfering

Anyway, as I said, I'm usually pretty mild, but this leaf thing was getting my goat. I suppose deep down I was plain scared, 'cause I knew it wasn't kids doing it. No, I knew there was something sinister going on, but I didn't want to face it. So I just got mad and set traps for my nocturnal visitors.

Barricading the back gate didn't work, nor did locking the laundry. When I opened up the morning after, all the leaves were bunched against the door on the inside—some had wormed out under it. It was so odd, I should have guessed then, and maybe I did. But I pretended otherwise, refusing to think about it and just raging upstairs to call the police. The cop I spoke to was sympathetic, but he wouldn't do anything about it. "Have these vandals wrecked anything—or stolen property?" he asked. When I said no, he told me to ring back when they did. I screamed at him that I'd been paying my taxes for fifty-odd years, and was this the best protection I could expect? He finally said he'd get a patrol car to cruise up and down the street during the night, just to keep an eye out for anything suspicious.

I don't know whether they did or not, but either way it didn't make any difference. The leaves were still scattered over the yard next morning.

After that I stayed up late, watching from my window above the laundry. I was determined to catch whoever was mucking me about, catch them and whop them good; I didn't see why I should be victimized just 'cause I'm old.

The funny thing was I didn't see anyone come in, even though I stayed up real late. I guess I must've fallen asleep some time early in the proceedings, 'cause when morning came the leaves were spread about again. So I gathered them up, then went to bed, even though it was only midday, hoping the extra rest would help me stay awake longer. By twelve the next night I'd been sitting watching for hours, the porch light blazing away; and no one had so much as peeked in the gate. It was really still; I noticed the treetops were quiet and the dark seemed breathless. But suddenly I sensed a movement on the path through the garden, and when I strained my eyes I saw it was leaves, scampering about like they were being tumbled in a wind. There was an unnatural slithery motion to the way they gathered and swirled between the shrubs, heading for the orange tree—I tell you, I was really spooked, and after a while I couldn't stand it any longer. I switched off the light and lay awake on my bed, staring at the ceiling. I avoided going into the garden from then on, 'cept when the sun was shining; and

even then I kept right away from the trees.

But, you know, while I was lying awake that night, I remembered a nightmare I'd had maybe a month before—and I think now that nightmare is the key to the whole thing. It'd disturbed me at the time, though I'd forgotten all about it since. In this nightmare I'd heard a noise outside and had gotten up to look; I saw someone walking down the street next to my block—though in fact the fence is too high for me to see anything, and that's how I know it was a dream. Anyway, this bloke was walking down the street and this other bloke came up behind him, and they had words. I couldn't hear what was said, but they both looked pretty excited. Then the second bloke stabbed the first, quickly, like the urge to strike him had been unexpected; they struggled a bit, the first man fell and the second began kicking him hard, and clubbing him, stabbing, until he finally went still. I could see the blood clearly, all glistening in the aura of the streetlight like he was painted with gloss enamel. After that the killer dragged the body of his victim around the corner into the alleyway that runs behind my yard. I watched, straining my eyes through a sort of drifting haze that seemed to be rising up out of the earth; he opened the back gate, dumped the body under the orange tree, dug a big hole and buried the dead man, raking leaves and grass clippings over the disturbed soil. Then he left.

The morning after that dream it had all more or less disappeared from my mind; but I remembered it now, and the memory acquired significance like a web gathers insects. The conclusion seemed obvious; my garden was the unwilling host to a dead man's corpse. The vibrations of his dying were turning even the leaves against me.

I grew steadily more convinced that this explanation, as ludicrous as it would have sounded not two weeks before, was the true one—and the knowledge made me reclusive. I even avoided windows so I didn't have to see the leaves, in case they suddenly took on a shape I couldn't bear. I lived on tinned food and stale bread, forgot to wash, and left the junk mail to accumulate in my postbox.

Two days later there was a knock on my front door. I ignored it, but the knocking, hard and insistent, didn't let up. Finally I crept over, peering out the side windows to catch a glimpse of whoever was there. It was a policeman. "What do you want?" I yelled at last.

"Mr. Yarrow, is it?" he said.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"Mr. Yarrow, I talked to you a few days ago. About vandalism. I wanted to check everything's okay. Why don't you open up?"

"Don't want to."

"Is your yard still being vandalized?"

"No. I was wrong. It wasn't vandals."

"What then?"

"Forget it. You can't help me."

He frowned. "I think you'd better let me in, Mr. Yarrow."

I opened the door; he was a big man, and seeing his uniform and the gun holstered at his hip, I felt better than I had for days.

"Now, Mr. Yarrow, what's all this about?" he said, looking at me shrewdly. So I took him to the back window and showed him the yard. I told him the story, and explained my belief that a murdered man had been buried under the orange tree. I guess he thought I was crazy. "Would you like me to go down and look?" he said. "I think we'll find this is just a fantasy, Mr. Yarrow—an idea you've gotten into your head somehow. Simple as that."

"No, I wouldn't if I were you," I commented.

"I think I should."

"Please yourself."

I went out onto the verandah with him, but refused to go down the stairs; I watched his back as he stepped into the yard and began walking along the path. There'd been a slight breeze all morning; now I noticed it'd dropped away.

"Where's your spade?" the policeman shouted.

"Near the laundry door."

He turned back, disappearing from sight; he reappeared with the spade. "Okay, I'm just going to scrape around down here. Sure you don't want to come?"

I shook my head. He made his way along the path, trod through the underbrush, and ducked under the branches of the orange tree. I could see him prodding the spade into the soil, pushing leaves away. After a moment I heard his voice call: "The ground *has* been dug up here!"

On the edge of my vision—from all around—I suddenly saw movement. Everywhere leaves were shifting, stirring as though a wind had hit the yard. None of the treetops was swaying.

"You'd better watch out!" I said.

Perhaps he didn't hear me; he certainly didn't react. The spade sliced into the ground, clearing the loose topsoil and the accumu-

lated layers of leaf that had gathered there. Through the green and brown-grey pattern of the tree, I could see dead leaves closing in around him. "They're coming!" I yelled.

I knew I had to do something then, or this guy'd be done for; he didn't realize what finding the body meant. The leaves were swarming toward him; what hope would he have if the power that drove them forced them together?

"My god, I think you're right," the policeman's voice drifted up to me through a burst of leafy chatter. "There's a body here . . . only a shallow grave . . . I think I can . . ." The sound was thick now, the surface of the yard drawing toward him in waves. " . . . Wallet is still in his pants." A pause. "Whittaker . . . estate agent . . . did you know him, Mr. Yarrow?"

I ran down the stairs and stumbled toward him. The leaf-rush had become deafening; I don't think the copper heard me coming. He was dragging at the body in the earth beneath the tree. I pulled a heavy stake from beside a sapling I'd planted the year before Elise died—I needed a weapon. "Hold on!" I yelled. He must have caught the edge in my voice then, 'cause he looked up; the leaves were like a tide around me and I beat out at them, trying to keep them apart. "They're after you!" I said. "Get out!" He dropped the arm of the corpse and straightened up; I was under the branches by then, thrashing frantically at the leaves. But I was too late; I saw horror sweep over the cop's face and then he slipped, covered in leaves and branches. I grabbed the spade and tried to beat them off him with it, clubbing and stabbing. Useless. Blood splashed out from the tangle, right onto my pants. That really made me mad, 'cause these pants cost me a fortune. See, the stain's still in them. Wouldn't wash out.

By then there was nothing more I could do. I turned and ran inside. As the door slammed, I thought I could hear him screaming. I might be wrong, I suppose; perhaps it was a dog howling, or the sound of a branch breaking off one of the trees, or a parrot squawking in the rising wind. But the policeman didn't come back. That was three days ago, and since then I haven't moved from this room.

You still want to look, eh? Well, I wouldn't advise it. You won't like whatever's down there. It's not very happy.

Okay, please yourself. But don't blame me if you get into trouble. There's two ghosts now and *I* can't be expected to keep them away from you.

I've got my own problems.

Murder in the Garden

by C. M. Chan



“Why,” hissed Jack Gibbons, “did you bring me here?”

Phillip Bethancourt, perspiring freely and smelling of horses, grinned and pushed his glasses more firmly onto the bridge of his nose. “To keep Marla occupied,” he answered. “To enable me to play polo in peace.”

Gibbons cast a glance at the

spectacular beauty sitting several feet from him, shaded from the sun by a large hat and her frosty expression. Marla liked horses only when paid to pose with them by prestigious fashion magazines. As she was one of England’s top fashion models, this was not an unknown occurrence.

“I don’t see why,” said Gibbons. “She doesn’t like me.”

"At least she's used to you," returned Bethancourt with unflinching cheerfulness. He was enormously fond of polo, if not a very expert player, and invitations to play did not proliferate in his life.

Marla, who did not like houseparties unless they were given by her friends, had only grudgingly agreed to come, and that was when she had thought the polo would be restricted to a couple of hours on Sunday. The news, on their arrival at the Marchbankses' country house, that there would be a Saturday practice and that in Colonel Marchbanks' house she and Bethancourt would stay in separate bedrooms had done nothing to improve her outlook on the weekend. The bridge party suggested after supper on Saturday had put the lid on it. Marla did not play bridge. The rest of the houseparty had been much relieved when Bethancourt had taken her off to the local pub for a beer and a row.

"It's going to be a dreary drive back," remarked Bethancourt, looking thoughtfully at his girlfriend. "Why don't you take her into the clubhouse and get her a drink? Cheer her up a bit."

Gibbons looked at her doubtfully. "I could try," he said, without much enthusiasm. "I don't expect she'll go."

"Of course she will," an-

swered Bethancourt. His gaze strayed to the Russian wolfhound lying docilely and elegantly at Gibbons' feet. "How's Cerberus bearing up?"

"He clearly feels that when you miss the ball it would be far more sensible to let him run out and carry it to the goal. I think he's thirsty," he added.

"Well, take him to the clubhouse, too," retorted Bethancourt. "There—I must mount up again. We'll win this match, see if we don't." He turned away, adding over his shoulder, "Do try to snap Marla out of it, Jack. It's going to be a hellish ride back to London otherwise."

But the drive to London was destined to be postponed.

Mrs. Marchbanks was a small, tidy woman, perpetually dressed in tweeds, with greying hair. She was as fond of horses as her husband, but was far more alert to the needs of people than he. The polo match being successfully concluded, everyone had retired to the house to clean up before the celebration party while the lady of the house saw to some supper preparations. She was interrupted by a telephone call and shortly thereafter knocked on the door of the room shared by Bethancourt and Gibbons just as Bethancourt was emerging from the shower.

"I am so sorry," she said. Behind her thick glasses, her eyes

were anxious. "I'm afraid there's been, well, a tragedy I suppose is the best word for it. Paul Blair has just phoned—he played today and you met him and his wife last night at supper."

"I remember," said Gibbons. "They're your neighbors, aren't they?"

"Yes, they are. They just got back from the polo match to find their little girl killed. They've called for the police, but Paul was wondering if the two of you might go over as well. As sort of..." Her voice trailed off, unsure of how to express tactfully the expertise of the two young men in murder.

"Of course we'll go right over," said Bethancourt soberly. "We'll be happy to do anything we can."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Marchbanks simply. "It seems so dreadful—first old Mr. Blair and now little Gemma."

"Old Mr. Blair?" said Gibbons, startled. "He was killed as well?"

"Oh, no. Goodness, no." Mrs. Marchbanks shook her head. "I didn't mean to say that. No, he was very elderly and passed away about two months ago. But Paul and Diana were very fond of him. Well, I'd best let you finish dressing. I'll be downstairs."

"We shan't be a moment," promised Bethancourt.

"I don't mind going over, Phillip," said Gibbons as the door closed behind Mrs. Marchbanks. "But you realize, don't you, that there may be some awkwardness with the local authorities? I mean, they haven't even determined yet if there is a crime, much less called in the Yard."

"Nonsense," replied Bethancourt, drawing on a pair of trousers. "A detective sergeant of New Scotland Yard is a boon to any investigation. Besides, they can't blame you for being practically on the scene of the crime—if there is one. So long as you don't try to lord it over them, I'm sure they'll cope beautifully."

"I hope so," said Gibbons.

The back of the Blair property abutted the back of the Marchbanks property. It was a simple matter to make their way through the Marchbankses' garden, pick up the path to the stables, and go past the buildings across the field in which the horses were pastured. Cerberus trotted happily before them, waiting obediently at the break in the dry stone wall that divided the estates.

"It's really much quicker than driving around," said Mrs. Marchbanks, leading the way towards a footbridge spanning the four-foot width of a beck.

"The Blair house is just over there. You can't see it because of the trees."

"Doesn't Paul have a brother?" inquired Bethancourt. "It seems to me that last night—"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Marchbanks. "That's Frank, the elder brother. But we don't know him terribly well. He left home for America when he was quite young and has returned only recently. Six or eight months ago, I think."

"But he lives at the house?"

"Oh, yes. I think actually the house is his now. He was the eldest, you see, so old Mr. Blair left the family things to him. And, of course, he used to be married. To some American girl, I believe, and there was a daughter. In fact, until he came home, I don't think the rest of the family knew he was divorced."

"Quite a shock," murmured Bethancourt. "Who else lives in the house?"

"Paul and Diana, of course, and their son, Benjamin. He's about eight. And Paul's sister, Gwen." Mrs. Marchbanks hesitated. "You won't have met her. She, well, several years ago her fiancé jilted her and she's had rather a drinking problem ever since. It was all hushed up while the old man was alive, but since his death, she's made a bit of a spectacle of herself a time or two."

"That's too bad."

"Yes. Let's see. Paul and Diana have a nanny for the children—Clara something-or-other. A young girl, but very capable."

"Local?"

"Oh, no. She came from one of those big London agencies. And there's Martha, of course, the housekeeper. She was with old Mr. Blair even before Paul got married and came back to the house to live. We'll go round here now—it's quicker to go around the garden and come up on the terrace."

They could see the house between the trees, a massive structure of Georgian design but built, Bethancourt suspected, somewhat later. They skirted the formal garden, a procedure of which Cerberus apparently disapproved. He abandoned his position as the dignified head of the party and lingered behind, sniffing hopefully at each entrance to the garden.

"Come on, boy," said Bethancourt. "We are *not* going that way. You can chase gophers or rabbits or whatever it is later. Now you must behave."

The dog looked wounded and managed to imply that he always behaved perfectly, even when it was wholly unnecessary.

Once through the trees they found a graveled path that led

them onto the flagstone terrace and the french doors at the back of the house. These were open and Paul Blair, still in polo dress, his dark hair ruffled and his face very white, came through them.

"Thank God you've come," he said. His hand trembled as he reached for Mrs. Marchbanks. "Diana's upstairs," he said. "She's quite hysterical and I'm afraid she'll hurt herself."

Mrs. Marchbanks was startled. "Surely Diana wouldn't deliberately do herself an injury?" she said.

"No, no, I don't mean that. We hadn't told anyone yet, but she's pregnant again. Only about two and a half months, but well, of course I don't really—"

He broke off abruptly and turned away, his face working violently against the tears.

"I'll go right up to Diana," said Mrs. Marchbanks. "Don't worry about her, Paul. She'll be fine."

She went inside, leaving Bethancourt and Gibbons standing awkwardly on the terrace. There was a long pause while they exchanged glances and averted their eyes from their host's shaking back. Then Bethancourt stepped forward and laid a hand on Blair's shoulder, saying firmly, "I think you need a drink. Is it through here?"

"I'm sorry," mumbled Blair.

He allowed himself to be led into the house and seemed to have got himself under control again by the time Bethancourt and Gibbons had found the whisky and poured stiff shots all around. Blair sipped his politely, without any real interest.

"I suppose it was silly of me to ask you to come," he said. "It's just that if there have to be police, I thought, better someone I know. I'm feeling so broken up that I couldn't face just strangers with my little girl . . ." He turned suddenly to the scotch.

"You *have* sent for the local authorities, though?" asked Gibbons, somewhat alarmed.

"Oh, yes. I did realize that I couldn't just call in an off-duty Scotland Yard man and an amateur sleuth and leave it at that. The local police should be along any minute."

"Can you tell us what happened?" Gibbons said.

"I don't know that I can. It all seems so incredible."

"But there must be a reason you felt it wasn't an accident?"

"Oh, yes." Blair sounded grim. "There're the marks on her neck. It was no accident. Someone—no, I can't talk of it." He drew a deep breath. "You must excuse me. The shock . . . she's upstairs in her room if you want to see for yourselves."

Bethancourt and Gibbons exchanged glances.

"It happened in the house?" asked Bethancourt gently.

"No, it was in the garden. Diana panicked, you see, and carried her upstairs. She—she didn't want to believe Gemma was dead."

"Your wife found her then?"

"Yes. Frank ran Clara and the children home before the end of the match—Clara wasn't feeling well and the children were tired. When Diana and I got back, Clara said the children were in the garden and Diana went to get them. But only Gemma was there. The first I knew of it, Diana came upstairs carrying Gemma and shouting for someone to call a doctor. I sent Clara to telephone and went to see what the matter was. But as soon as I saw her, I knew. Diana wouldn't believe it. I left Martha with her and called Mrs. Marchbanks and then the police." He stared dully at them. "I know what happened, but I still can't believe it. Who would want to harm a child? She was only four years old."

To this neither Bethancourt nor Gibbons had an answer. Fortunately, at that moment there was an interruption. A thin woman of about fifty appeared in the doorway. She had clearly been crying, for her nose was red and her grey eyes were

swollen and pink-rimmed, but she was more or less composed at the moment. She nodded at Bethancourt and Gibbons and then addressed herself to Blair in a gentle, subdued voice.

"The doctor is here, sir. I've sent him up to Mrs. Blair and then he'll be down to see you." She paused. "He looked in at Gemma, sir, just to be sure."

Blair's head drooped. "Yes, of course," he muttered. "Thank you, Martha."

She nodded and left, only to return a few minutes later with the police. Superintendent Blake, a solid, impressive personage, paused on the threshold in some surprise and a modicum of displeasure. He might not have recognized Phillip Bethancourt from the picture in the local paper captioned "Famous Amateur Sleuth to Play Polo on Sunday," but there was no mistaking the elegant dog that lay at the young man's feet. Superintendent Blake did not wholly approve of wealthy young men who spent their leisure time mucking about in police matters, and if this was how they got involved in their cases, by pushing in on grieving parents before the police had even arrived, he felt his disapproval justified. He was somewhat reassured by Blair's explanation that Bethancourt was a personal friend and had been sent for, but this reassur-

ance was overtaken by the news that the other young man present was a detective sergeant of New Scotland Yard.

He eyed the pair suspiciously while he was told that the doctor had confirmed the little girl's death and was presently administering to the mother, who had found the body. He sent his sergeant upstairs to look at the body and await the doctor's emergence from Mrs. Blair's room, and asked to see the scene of the crime.

"It was in the garden," said Blair uncertainly, well aware that an acre of flowers and meandering paths was not what was meant by "scene of the crime."

"I expect," said Martha, "that she was in the children's corner near the terrace. That's where she usually played. I can show you where it is, and your man can find out for sure when the doctor's finished with Mrs. Blair."

She moved toward the french doors while Gibbons said easily, "You don't mind if we trail along, do you, superintendent?"

Blake was not pleased with the request, but it would have been difficult to refuse. Besides, if it did turn out to be murder, the chief would likely send for the Yard in any case. There was no use in starting off on the wrong foot.

Martha led the way down the

steps of the terrace and along a path running parallel to the house. At the far end was a small square, nestled into a corner formed by the terrace on one side and the high hedge that separated the kitchen garden from its more elegant counterpart on the other. A square of well-tended grass lay in the middle of it, but along its borders were planted a bewildering variety of plants, flowers, and vegetables.

"The children wanted to plant their own garden," explained Martha, "so the master—the late Mr. Blair—gave them this. They chose the plants and helped put them in, but of course the regular gardener goes over it when he comes, same as the rest." She pointed to three or four boulders grouped haphazardly on a corner of the green. "They liked to play on those, or just sit on them and look at their flowers. Sometimes they'd do a bit of weeding or just digging about in the dirt. In any case, they were taught most strict that they mustn't play with the other flowers or stray from the paths, so if Gemma was here alone, I'm sure this is where she'd be."

They all stared at the corner, but it looked pleasant and placid in the late afternoon sun and gave nothing away.

"The kitchen door is beyond the hedge?" asked Blake.

"Yes. I can show you if you'd like."

"A little later perhaps. I was just wondering if you could hear anything from this part of the garden in the kitchen."

"In this weather, with the door and window open, I can hear quite clearly. But of course I wasn't there this afternoon." Martha looked aggrieved.

"Could you tell us where you were?"

"I was upstairs," she answered. "There was an awful great leak in the children's bathroom, and both their rooms were swimming. Clara found it when she got home and I went upstairs to help her clear up. We were still at it when Mrs. Blair came home and asked for the children."

"They were in the garden?"

"Yes, Clara sent them down with Miss Blair while we were mopping up. We were just finishing up and starting to take the rugs out when Mrs. Blair come running back up with Gemma in her arms, calling for Mr. Blair and a doctor." Martha closed her eyes briefly.

"What happened then?" asked Blake gently.

Martha drew a deep breath. "Clara went to call the doctor," she said. "I couldn't carry the rugs without her, so I followed Mr. Blair into Gemma's room. He and Mrs. Blair were bending over the bed, so I couldn't

see Gemma, but I heard Mr. Blair say, 'My God, Diana, she's dead,' and then Mrs. Blair saying no, it wasn't true. And then Mr. Blair said, 'Diana, where's Ben?' I couldn't hear what she said, but Mr. Blair turned and came running out and said to me, 'Martha, where's Ben?' I said I didn't know and he said, 'We've got to find him. Hurry!' So we run downstairs, calling, but as we got to the ground floor, we saw Clara coming out of the study with him." Martha sighed. "I was never so relieved in my life to see him, and Mr. Blair hugged him something fierce."

Martha paused, as if to collect her thoughts. "It was then," she continued, "that Mr. Blair phoned for the police and sent me up to Mrs. Blair. 'You go up to Mrs. Blair,' he said, 'and for God's sake try and get her to lie down in her own room.' So I did, but it wasn't easy. And then Mrs. Marchbanks come and I went downstairs to help Clara get some supper for Benjamin. No one had told her yet, so I called her into the pantry and gave her the news where Benjamin couldn't hear. The poor girl was so upset I had to give her some of the cooking sherry."

"Thank you very much," said the superintendent. "That's a very clear account. Just one thing, Mrs. Alcock. You say Clara sent the children down-

stairs with Miss Blair. What became of her?"

A frown creased Martha's face, and she hesitated. "I think she had fallen asleep in the living room," she said slowly. "When I was taking Mrs. Blair back to her room, I thought I heard Mr. Blair and his sister talking in there. She must have come in from the garden by the french doors and fallen asleep there."

"And she wasn't awakened in the ensuing uproar?"

Martha's face grew obstinate. "The living room doors were closed," she said. "And Miss Blair is a sound sleeper."

Martha, thought Bethan-court, was clearly not willing to admit there was an alcoholic in the family.

They were interrupted by a young, fair girl of about twenty-five who called to them from the terrace.

"Martha—oh, there you are. The police surgeon is here, and I didn't know what to do. The doctor's taken Mr. Blair upstairs."

"This is Superintendent Blake, Clara," said Martha. "I suppose he and the surgeon will want to go up to Gemma's room."

"Oh!" The girl looked unsure. "I've put Ben to bed in his own room," she said, looking at Blake. "I hope that's all right? There's only the bathroom between his room and Gemma's,

but Mrs. Blair's locked the door on Gemma's side so Ben can't go wandering in. He doesn't know anything yet except that something's wrong with Gemma, and I thought it would be more reassuring for him to be in his own room. But if you're going to be making a lot of noise . . ."

"No, no," the superintendent reassured her. "No need for any noise at all. We can whisper a bit and Crimms, our surgeon, is quiet by nature. We won't wake the lad up."

"Oh, well, thank you."

"We'll be wanting to speak to you, miss, when we've done upstairs. If you could wait in the kitchen, perhaps, with Mrs. Alcock?"

"Of course."

"Thank you."

"We won't go up with you, superintendent," said Bethan-court as they made their way back to the house. "We don't want to wake the boy. But if you wouldn't mind our just sitting in the background when you talk to Clara, we'd appreciate it."

"You understand, superintendent," put in Gibbons. "We don't want to interfere with you at all, but as we're johnny-on-the-spot anyhow, we might as well hear what has to be said. And if it does end up at the Yard, though I can't see why it should, it'd be useful for us to

have a preliminary report."

Appealed to in these terms, the superintendent could hardly say no.

"Just one thing," added Bethancourt, "about Miss Blair falling asleep? I understand from our hosts that Miss Blair has been an alcoholic for several years."

A light gleamed in Blake's eyes and Bethancourt's fresh complexion and easy air suddenly became less objectionable. "So she was probably out cold, was she?" he said. "That's more like it. I thought the nap business sounded funny."

In the hall, they were met by Sergeant Westley.

"Both parents have been sedated, sir," he reported. "The doctor, Dr. Barnes, is waiting in the study to see you. I've sent Crimms on up to look at the body, and the scene-of-the-crime men are waiting outside in the car. Miss Blair, Mr. Blair's sister, is waiting in her room and, if you ask me, she's drunk. I understand Mr. Blair's older brother, Frank, also resides in the house, but no one has seen him since the end of the polo match this afternoon. It's thought he probably went off to the local pub for a celebration drink, although he wasn't playing."

"Did you speak to Mrs. Blair?"

"No, sir. The doctor thought it inadvisable."

Superintendent Blake bit his lower lip. "Then we're none too sure where the scene of the crime is. Still, better get the boys started on that patch of garden. It's more than likely that's where it happened. The housekeeper is in the kitchen. Take them through there and have her show you where I mean. I'll go up now and talk to Dr. Barnes when Crimms is done."

The sergeant was just turning toward the door when it swung open and a man similar to Paul Blair in feature stood in the door frame staring at them.

"What the—" he began and then, very inappropriately, belched.

"Excuse me," he said. His eyes lighted on Gibbons. "Jack, isn't it?" he said. "And Phillip, too. What the devil is going on here? I knew you were a policeman, Jack, but I didn't realize you traveled with half the force. There's half a dozen men sitting in my driveway."

"I'm afraid," said Bethancourt, "that something rather dreadful has happened. Your little niece was found dead this afternoon."

Frank Blair gaped at him. "Gemma?" he said. "But that's nonsense. She can't be dead. I dropped her off here myself not more than a couple of hours ago. She was fine. Just fine. She

can't be dead, do you hear me? She can't."

"We're very sorry, Frank," said Gibbons, stepping forward. "I'm afraid someone killed her. This is Superintendent Blake, come to investigate."

Blair still looked stricken. He rubbed his head. "Are you sure?" he asked. "I mean, has there been a doctor?"

"Yes, sir," said Blake. "Dr. Barnes is still here if you wish to see him."

"No, that's all right." He shook his head. "God! I wish I hadn't drunk so much. But we were celebrating, you see. Lord, some celebration. Where's Paul?"

"He's resting." Gibbons glanced at the superintendent. "Maybe you'd like to go to your room and have some coffee? Superintendent Blake will want to speak to you later."

"Yes, all right. That's a good idea, some coffee."

"Come on. I'll go up with you."

Bethancourt volunteered to go to the kitchen for the coffee while Gibbons led Frank Blair up the stairs with the superintendent in their wake.

thought it had been quick and took the body away for further study. Dr. Barnes said he advised neither parent be disturbed until tomorrow at the earliest.

Clara, when called into the study after this pronouncement, was more forthcoming. She had been employed by the Blairs for the last two years and had none of Martha's old family retainer reticence. She confirmed Martha's story in every detail, sitting quietly before them, her eyes frightened and confused, and then added that she should never have left the children in Gwen Blair's care.

"It wasn't a thing I normally do," she declared. "But I never thought they'd come to any harm in their own bit of garden, even if she wasn't really watching them. And I couldn't leave Martha to clean up that dreadful mess alone. I thought the old drunk would at least keep within earshot. But Benjamin says she never even took them outside. He says she stopped in the living room and said she'd be right out. When she didn't come in a couple of minutes, he went back inside, but she was sound asleep on the couch. So he decided he didn't want to play in the garden and went into the study. He likes to do that—he sits at the desk and pretends he's his father. I found him there when I went in to call

Both doctors had nothing to say beyond the fact that the little girl had been strangled with someone's bare hands within an hour of her arriving home. Dr. Crimms added that he

for the doctor. He'd fallen asleep in the chair."

"So Benjamin was only with his sister in the garden for a few minutes?"

"So he says. It probably wasn't long at all—you know how children are. A minute is an hour to them."

"Well," whispered Bethan-court to Gibbons, "that blows narrowing down the time."

Superintendent Blake evidently thought so, too, for he frowned a little. "Now, Miss Martin," he said, "is it your opinion that, when you asked her to take charge of the children, Miss Blair was already drunk?"

Clara nodded, her fair hair falling over her forehead. "She almost always is," she said simply. "But I knew she would be this afternoon because of that fight with her brother this morning. Anything like that was enough to set her off."

"Which brother did she argue with?"

"Oh, Mr. Frank, of course. Mr. Paul is sweetness itself."

"Did you hear what the argument was about?"

"Only a word or two, but I'm sure it was the same old thing. They don't get on, you see, and ever since old Mr. Blair died and left the house and most of the money to Mr. Frank, he's been threatening to kick Miss Blair out."

"Do you think he means it, or is it just hot temper?"

Clara frowned thoughtfully. "I'm not sure," she said at last. "At first I thought it was just what you said—hot temper. But now I think more and more he means it. She's not very easy to have around sometimes, and he's been away so long I don't think he really feels a family attachment any more. Anyway, he's fought with everyone since he's come back. Why, he was yelling at Martha today when I came down to get her."

"And what was that about?"

"Same thing. She's never liked him. She always calls him the black sheep. He was going to sack her right after Mr. Blair died, but Mr. Paul said in that case he would be happy to pay her salary. So she stayed."

All at once tears came into the girl's eyes. "I hope the Blairs won't want to sack me after to-day," she said. "They did warn me when I first came not to let Miss Blair look after the children. Mrs. Blair was most particular. She said, 'Miss Blair will probably offer to look after them for you, but don't let her. I don't mean you shouldn't leave them alone with her if you have to run upstairs or anything like that, but she mustn't be allowed to take them for walks or outings or to look after them for a whole afternoon.' But," she burst out, "I thought the garden

was safe. Who could have gotten to them there?"

"Who indeed?" said Bethancourt after she had gone and they were awaiting the arrival of Miss Blair. "It's not very likely it was a stranger."

"No," agreed Gibbons. "Anyone trespassing would keep clear of the house. And the Lord knows they have enough ground here to do that with ease."

They considered the problem in silence for a moment. At the massive oak desk, the superintendent compared notes with his sergeant. Gibbons cast a glance at Bethancourt, who was smoking a cigarette and staring out the window. Gibbons achieved his results as a detective by intelligence and hard work and he was uncommonly good at it, a fact which had already been noticed by his superiors at Scotland Yard. Bethancourt, on the other hand, with no need for a job or for anything else other than to keep his intellect stimulated, was intuitive rather than hardworking. He had helped Gibbons on a number of cases in the past, but Gibbons was still unable to tell when a jumble of facts was about to fall into place in Bethancourt's mind and when they were not. At the moment his friend's face was a blank. He took a last puff of his cigarette and turned to stub it out in

the ashtray at his elbow.

"We're still left with why anyone would want to kill a four-year-old child," he said.

"Maybe," said Gibbons soberly, "someone was so drunk she didn't know what she was doing."

"Maybe," said Bethancourt. "We'll soon see," he added as the door opened.

Gwendolyn Blair was a thoroughly unattractive woman. What in her brothers' faces passed for reasonably decent male looks, in hers merely looked male and out of place. In compensation, she had grown her hair long, but it lay flat and untended on her scalp. She was very thin, but her body beneath slacks and shirt was long-waisted, short-legged, and as neglected as her hair. She was also, despite the coffee forced on her by Sergeant Westley, very drunk.

She sat down quietly, swaying a little, and answered the superintendent's questions in a low voice. She kept darting suspicious looks at Bethancourt for no discernible reason and picking nervously at her sleeves. But when the superintendent asked her what had happened that afternoon, speech burst out of her in an unstoppable stream.

"It wasn't my fault!" she cried

shrilly. "I loved both those children. I adored them. You don't know how badly I wanted children of my own. I don't care what Paul says. He brings that bitch of a wife here to live and then accuses me of letting their children be murdered. Everybody here hates me, just because I'm not strong. My health is very weak. Diana never understood that. She sneers at me, when she has everything she wants."

"Then she must be lucky indeed," murmured Bethancourt under his breath, but she did not hear him; she was going on. Her diatribe against Diana Blair seemed to be mostly based on the fact that Diana was pretty, was married, and had children. The strong hatred she bore her sister-in-law was shocking, and it was with difficulty that Blake brought her back to the events of that afternoon.

"I'm always happy to look after the children—more than happy. But Diana wouldn't have it, hiring that snooty nurse. 'I think I'd better see to the children myself,' she mimicked Clara. "'It's what I'm paid for, Miss Blair.' And then today she gives me instructions as if I were her servant! 'Don't take them out of the garden,' she says. 'And call me at once if anything happens.' As if I couldn't take care of them perfectly well."

"So you took them down and let them into the garden," prompted Blake, hoping to forestall an outburst against Clara.

"Yes. I'd had a very difficult day. Frank said the most dreadful things to me this morning—it upset me so much I had to go and lie down and couldn't go to the polo at all. I still really wasn't feeling well when Clara asked me to take the children, but of course I said I would. I was going to watch them from the terrace, but the sun was so bright it made me feel quite faint. I just sat down in the living room for a moment and I must have drifted off. I didn't mean to! It wasn't my fault! I really wasn't well. And the children should have been safe. They were just outside. I would have heard them if they'd called. Paul can't blame me."

She burst into tears while still protesting her innocence. In vain did Superintendent Blake ask her to calm herself, ask her if she had been wakened by anything. He got nothing but tears and the fact that it wasn't her fault. Finally Bethancourt, who had often before proved himself good with distraught witnesses, rose and patted her shoulder.

"You're naturally very upset," he said kindly. "Perhaps while you talk to the superintendent, you'd like me to bring you some tea? Or perhaps a

drink would calm your nerves?"

The result of this offer was quite unexpected. She lifted her haggard face to look at him and spat out angrily that men like him were the worst of all. Startled, Bethancourt stepped back while both Blake and Westley tried to stem the tide. But she was in full stride, going on quite incoherently about men who cared nothing for women but how they looked. Bethancourt hastily decided that discretion was the better part of valor and, shrugging at the superintendent, left the room.

It was quiet in the hall, unnaturally so. Cerberus rose from his station by the door and greeted his master with restrained enthusiasm. Bethancourt absently patted his head and then, after looking about, went upstairs. He hesitated on the first floor for a moment and then started down the corridor to the right, only to be stopped by the appearance of a boy, who stood and stared at him.

"Hullo," said Bethancourt, going forward. "I don't think we've met. I'm Phillip."

The boy continued to gaze at him silently for a moment and then said, "You played polo with Daddy."

"So I did. You must be Benjamin."

"Yes, I am." His gaze strayed to Cerberus. "That's a nice dog," he said. "Is he yours?"

"Yes. You can pet him if you like. His name is Cerberus."

Benjamin solemnly patted the dog, who obligingly wagged his tail. Then suddenly the boy looked uneasy. "He won't chase the cat, will he?" he asked anxiously. "She's in my room. She's not supposed to be, but Clara said I could have her just this once."

"No, he won't chase her," answered Bethancourt, hastily ordering Cerberus to sit just in case.

"We got the cat for the mice," confided the boy. "She's caught an awful lot. Do you have mice?"

Bethancourt admitted that he did not.

"Gemma and I liked them," said Benjamin. "But we like the cat better. Where is Gemma? Clara said she was sick, but she's not in her room."

This was awkward. "I think the doctor took her away," said Bethancourt cautiously.

Benjamin's eyes grew wide. "To the hospital?"

"I believe so."

"Will we go and visit her like we did Grandpa?" This had obviously been a treat.

"I don't know. You should have to ask your parents that."

Benjamin considered. "I hope she gets better soon," he said.

"You like your sister then?" asked Bethancourt, who could never remember really liking his own.

"I guess so. She's all right for a girl. But she's awful dumb sometimes. Do you know what she said today?"

"No, I don't."

"She said that girl you were with looked like a fairy princess. She said there was a picture in a book with the same color hair."

This struck Bethancourt as astute rather than dumb. If anyone was going to be nominated for looking most like a fairy princess, Marla, he felt, should certainly be first choice. And her coppery hair was certainly an unusual color.

"I think that's fanciful rather than stupid," he said.

"Maybe," agreed Benjamin grudgingly. "But she is silly sometimes."

"All girls are."

"Do you know what she said about Grandpa's will? She said it was in a mousehole."

"A mousehole?"

"Yes. I told her she was silly and even Mummy said that wills were kept with solicitors, not in mouseholes." He drew himself up. "But I knew that before Mummy told us."

"I daresay you did. But perhaps your sister got the idea out of a book again."

"Maybe. But she should still have known it was silly. Only mice would keep their wills in mouseholes."

Bethancourt agreed to this.

"Tell me," he said, "when you were playing in the garden today, did you see anyone?"

The boy frowned. "Like who?"

"Oh, anyone. Martha, maybe, or your aunt."

"Aunt Gwen was supposed to be looking after us, but she was asleep in the living room. There was no one else. But I didn't want to play in the garden. We did that all day yesterday."

"So you took Gemma out there and then went back inside?"

He nodded. "I didn't want Gemma to fall down the steps," he said. "She did that once and cut her knee. We had to have the doctor."

"That sounds bad."

Benjamin considered. "We got extra ice cream for it," he said.

"Well, that makes it better," said Bethancourt, suppressing a smile. "So you saw Gemma safely into the garden and then went back to your aunt?"

"Yes, but she was asleep, so I couldn't ask her if I could play in the study."

"I quite see that."

"So I went by myself. I was going to go back and fetch Gemma later, but I fell asleep."

"Benjamin! There you are."

It was Clara, coming down the hall. "I thought I heard you out here. Aren't you supposed to be in bed?"

"I just went to see Gemma, but she wasn't there."

Clara looked startled and

Bethancourt said hastily, "I told him the doctor had taken her to hospital."

"Will we go and see her, Clara?" asked Benjamin.

"We might," said Clara, recovering herself. "We'll ask your mother in the morning. But she certainly won't want to take little boys who haven't had their sleep. You come right along, young man, and get back into bed."

She led her charge firmly away, but found Bethancourt waiting when she emerged from the child's room.

"Have they finished downstairs, then?" she asked.

"No," he answered, "but Miss Blair has taken a dislike to me, so I left."

"Really? Well, she's that unaccountable. You probably touched one of her sore spots."

"I certainly did something wrong," agreed Bethancourt. "But she doesn't seem to have much fellow-feeling in general. Tell me, is she always like that?"

"She—but come down the hall if you want to chat. I don't want to keep Benjamin awake."

She led the way to a large room with bed, bureau, and wardrobe at one end and two armchairs and a table at the other.

"Mrs. Blair set this up for me," she said, "so I could be comfortable and still near the

children of an evening. Do sit down. Now, what was I saying?"

"Miss Blair," said Bethancourt helpfully, sinking into one of the armchairs.

"Oh, yes." She sat opposite him. "She's not really so bad, you know. Mostly she just stays in her room and drinks. She has this mania, you see. Well, she's not very pretty—" Bethancourt felt this to be a vast understatement—"and I heard once that when she was young she was engaged and he threw her over for another, really pretty girl. Anyway, she never got over it, and now she has a mania about goodlooking women. Or men that marry them, it seems sometimes. Every once in a while she goes on a tirade, usually about Mrs. Blair, but that's not so often. Usually when she comes downstairs at all, it's just to complain about her health."

"Does she eat with the family?"

"Not usually. She gets a tray in her room. Old Mr. Blair, so I hear, started that after one night when she made a scene at dinner. Martha told me. He said to her, 'Gwen, you are an appalling example to Benjamin. I think, after this, you had better eat upstairs.' She didn't dare argue with him. Not that he was an old tartar or anything. He was really a lamb." She shook her head. "This hor-

rible thing would never have happened if he were alive. I would have sent the children in to him, then."

"He was fond of them, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! He adored both of them, but I think secretly Gemma was his favorite. She was always in his room, day or night. If I couldn't find her ever, I knew I'd find them together. If ever he said a thing, nobody could do it fast enough, but I never heard an angry word from him. Not, anyway, until Mr. Frank came back."

"That's right. I believe you said he fights with everyone."

"Well, he does. It was after an argument with him that Mr. Blair had that stroke. He was bedridden when he came back from hospital, and we had to have a nurse in. He died in his sleep just a few months later." She sighed and was silent a moment. "I think he had another fight with him that night he died," she said at last. "I know they had a terrible argument that morning. Nurse Carruthers was quite put out about it. She came up from her breakfast to find them going at it hammer and tongs. She turned Mr. Frank out pretty neatly and then sat glowering at Mr. Blair's door the rest of the day. But Benjamin had a nightmare that night and went into his parents' room. He asked me

later if Uncle Frank had been with Grandpa when he died. I asked him why and he said he'd seen him in his grandpa's room." She shook her head. "I'm sure they argued and that caused the fatal stroke."

"What did they argue about?" asked Bethancourt.

"Oh, mostly about what Mr. Frank was doing with his life. He didn't have a job, you see, and Mr. Blair didn't like that. I think he threatened to cut Mr. Frank out of his will. But of course he never meant it. He left him everything in the end."

"Surely he made some provision for Paul and Diana and the children?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Paul makes a good salary himself, so they didn't get much. But Benjamin and Gemma got tidy sums—I don't know exactly how much, of course. Gemma was thrilled. She kept saying that they'd inherited Grandpa's whole fortune. I don't know what put that in her head. He even left me a little bequest. But of course the house and everything and most of the money went to Mr. Frank as the oldest son."

"Lots of older people feel that way," said Bethancourt.

"Well, I won't say Mr. Blair wasn't old fashioned. He had his own way of doing things, and he was very particular. But you expect that in older people."

"Yes. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Go ahead. There's no ash-tray, but you can use the fire-place."

"Thank you." Bethancourt drew out a cigarette and went to stand by the mantel. "Do Frank and Paul get on well?"

Clara hesitated. This apparently was delicate territory. "Better than most," she said. "They don't argue much."

"But there was something?" pressed Bethancourt.

"Well, I shouldn't like to have it passed round," she said. "But Mrs. Marchbanks knows, so I suppose there's no harm. It was about three months back. Mr. Frank invited Mr. and Mrs. Blair to go with him to the pub after supper. Mr. Paul couldn't go, but he said Mrs. Blair should. I don't think she really wanted to, but they were trying to smooth over a fight Mr. Frank had had with Miss Blair, so she went. Well, they got back late and Mrs. Blair was furious. It seems Mr. Frank had taken a bit too much and, well, he tried to kiss Mrs. Blair in the car on the way home. The whole family was up in arms over that, because of course Mr. Paul told his father. Mr. Frank apologized, but it didn't go down very well. It took a long time for that to settle down. Mrs. Blair told Martha later that she was sorry she had told her husband, that it would have been better to

have slapped Mr. Frank's face and let it go at that. But she was that angry, she said, that she never thought."

"Understandably." Bethancourt threw his cigarette into the fireplace. "And the children?"

"The children?" Clara looked blank.

"How does Frank get on with them?"

"Oh, he doesn't fight with them." She laughed at the thought. "No one fights with the children. Even Martha dotes on them. They're the only ones who can invade her kitchen without fear of recrimination." She paused and grew sober. "Mr. Frank was very fond of Gemma. You see, he had a little girl of his own, only a few years older. He left her in America. His wife had custody, you see."

"And Miss Blair? Is she fond of them too?"

"More than fond. She always wanted children herself—very badly. It's rather a pity that she can't be trusted with them. She would love to mother them. I think it's rather sad, really." She shook her head. "There," she said, "I'd almost forgotten poor Gemma. Nothing is as sad as that. I can't bear to think of it. I can't bear to think of poor Benjamin finding out tomorrow."

She was crying, very quietly. There was not much Bethan-

court could say, so he went to her and offered his shoulder to be cried on.

It was not long before there was a knock on the door, and Gibbons poked his head in.

"I didn't think you'd have left yet, Phillip," he said. "The superintendent has finished downstairs and is calling it a day. It's long past supper time. I thought rather than bother the Marchbankses, we might try the local pub. We'll just make it before closing."

Bethancourt agreed to this plan, and taking leave of Clara, they left the house by the back way, making their way slowly through the darkened garden.

"How on earth are we going to find the footbridge?" grumbled Gibbons.

"Cerberus will find it," said Bethancourt calmly. "Come on, now—we're out of earshot. What did the superintendent make of it all? And what on earth made Gwen Blair go off at me like that?"

Gibbons grinned. "She'd seen a picture of you and Marla somewhere. Her whole point, since you didn't remain to hear it, was that if Marla was Marla in every respect, but looked like Gwen, you wouldn't have anything to do with her."

"She's certainly right there," said Bethancourt. "If Marla weren't absurdly beautiful,

there would be hardly any point to her at all. Which reminds me, when we get back I had better go up and be yelled at before we go to the pub."

"We'll never get to the pub if you do that."

"I can't help it. She hasn't had a chance to vent her temper all day. If I go off to a pub without her, she'll probably break up with me."

"Imagine she looks like Gwendolyn Blair and you won't mind."

"Yes, I would. Marla is not only spectacularly beautiful; she also has spectacular high spirits and a spectacular temper. I like extremes."

"It's a pity she isn't spectacularly sweet," retorted Gibbons. Then, "Ow! I think I've run into a tree."

"Serves you right for saying unkind things," said Bethancourt. "Now, what conclusions were drawn?"

"The superintendent seems to think Gwen Blair did it. I have to say it looks like it. She was probably so drunk she doesn't even remember it. But it's not going to be easy to prove. In fact, I doubt it can be proved at all."

"The scene-of-the-crime men found nothing?"

"They managed some footprints, but what of that? The whole family was out there yesterday."

"Mmm," said Bethancourt. "You know, Jack, if it was Gwen, there's really no need to prove it anyway, so long as Paul and Diana are convinced."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if she *were* convicted, it would be an insanity plea. The court would probably sentence her to an insane asylum. If you convince Paul and Diana, they're bound to do the same thing. They're her relatives. They could have her committed."

"I suppose that's true. But you don't sound very convinced yourself."

"I just don't see why she's more likely than anyone else. She loved those children, Jack. They were for her the children she wanted and could never have."

"She's more likely because only she could have done it without realizing it."

"But would she? I freely admit she would be more than likely, when dead drunk, to strangle Diana. But why the child she loved?"

"Perhaps the little girl said something. Called her a drunk, for instance."

"Perhaps," admitted Bethancourt. "But here's the other thing in her favor: Benjamin says she was already passed out when he left Gemma in the garden and came through the living room."

"Phillip, being drunk is hardly an alibi for murder. But all right. Let's hear your story."

"I don't have one. I just think it's early days yet, and everyone except Paul had opportunity. Frank, for instance. He has a fight with Martha, nips out to the garden and kills Gemma, and is back at the match in no time."

"You didn't see him, Phillip. He's really broken up—almost worse than Paul. That grief was real, I'm sure of it."

"All right. There's still Martha and Clara."

"They were together upstairs."

"Nonsense. You can't tell me neither of them ran downstairs for anything the whole time."

"That's true," said Gibbons slowly, thinking back. "Martha did mention going out to empty the bucket once or twice. But still, why on earth should she do such a thing?"

"Why would anybody? But I refuse to believe," he added firmly, "that Diana did it when she went out to get her. She could have, of course, but I don't believe it."

"Neither," agreed Gibbons fervently, "do I."

"However," began Bethancourt, when his tone changed and he said sharply, "I say, Jack, stop! Don't come any further."

"What? Why not?" said Gib-

bons, peering into the gloom.

"Because I've found the beck, damn it," said Bethancourt glumly. "My left foot is in it."

Gibbons began to laugh heartily. "I thought you said Cerberus would find the bridge."

"He has," came the reply. "You can just see him standing on it over there."

Back at the Marchbankses' they found a note from Marla informing Bethancourt that she had gone to the polo celebration party, she was wearing the green dress he liked so much, and she wouldn't care if she never saw him again if he weren't due to transport her out of this hell-hole early tomorrow morning.

Bethancourt breathed a sigh of relief. "She'll have a good time at the party and come back in a better temper," he said. "No one's yet invented a party so dull Marla can't have a good time at it. It's all those men flocking around her. Let's go to the pub."

But over an uninspired supper Bethancourt became thoughtful, and conversation languished.

"It's an odd situation," said Gibbons at last. "Here you have an apparently idyllic household. Husband and wife, happily married, living with his father, with whom they appear to get on, with two adorable

children, a devoted housekeeper, and an equally devoted nanny. Then mix in a sister who's so drunk most of the time that she can't leave her room, and a brother who comes home after decades away and fights with everybody. It seems odd that one side is all sweetness and light and the other so dark and troubled."

"It's not as dark and troubled as all that," replied Bethancourt, rousing himself to light an after-dinner cigarette. "Poor Gwen is obviously mentally unbalanced. Probably if her father hadn't been so old fashioned, she'd have been in therapy years ago, or at least in an alcoholics' program. As it is, she's just been let to decline, as if we were still in the nineteenth century. And Frank clearly doesn't get on with his father and never has. Look at the facts. He runs away from home as soon as he's old enough not to be dragged back by the scruff of his neck and isn't seen again for fifteen years or so. He returns to find his sister a wreck and his father no more amenable than when he went away. Martha is devoted to her employer, who doesn't much like his son, so she doesn't like him either. You said she admitted she started that fight this afternoon. He may have come a cropper over the thing with Diana, but they all seemed perfectly amiable

when we met them last night. And you can bet Mrs. Marchbanks wouldn't have invited him if it wasn't all right with Paul and Diana."

"That's true," said Gibbons. "I wonder, though, why he came back to England at all."

Bethancourt shrugged. "Trouble of some sort in America, I would guess. He was divorced—maybe it had to do with that."

"Perhaps," said Gibbons. "Well, shall we get coffee at home? They've had last call here."

They had almost reached the Marchbankses' when suddenly Bethancourt, who had driven silently up till then, slapped the steering wheel and cursed himself for a fool.

"What is it?" asked Gibbons.

"I can't believe I missed it," replied Bethancourt, downshifting rapidly and edging the Jaguar around in the narrow roadway.

"Missed what?" asked Gibbons. "Where the hell are you going?"

"Back to the Blairs'."

"Now? They'll all be asleep. You must be mad."

"We'll sneak in through the back. Those french doors don't have a lock worth mentioning."

"Can't it wait till morning? What is it?"

"Of course it can't wait till

morning. I have to drive Marla back in the morning. Besides, I could be wrong. I have to find out."

"Find out what?" screamed Gibbons, almost frantic with curiosity. "What on earth is it that you suddenly see? I don't see anything."

"That," said Bethancourt, putting down the accelerator now that the turn had been negotiated, "is because I haven't told you everything I heard from Benjamin and Clara. The most important information we've had all day, and I filtered it out as nonsense."

"Phillip," said Gibbons in a dangerous tone, "if you don't tell me what it is you've remembered, I shall arrest you on the spot for exceeding the speed limit."

Bethancourt told him.

The house was indeed dark, but the french doors proved negotiable. Inside, they made their way upstairs in the dark to what had been the elder Mr. Blair's room.

"He was an invalid," whispered Bethancourt, "it must be here—he couldn't get anywhere else."

"We'd better have a light," said Gibbons. "I can see one over there."

He flicked it on to find Bethancourt crouched on the floor

peering at the baseboard.

"There's one," he said, stretching full length on the floor to reach beneath the bedside table. "But I don't see anything."

"Feel around," urged Gibbons, who was anxiously scanning the farther wall. "Here's one, too. God, the place is rife." He, too, fell on the floor, this time by the wardrobe, and plunged his fingers into a mousehole. "Phillip, there's something here. Look—I have it!"

Bethancourt scrambled to his feet and stood over Gibbons who sat crosslegged on the floor unfolding a single sheet of white paper. They froze as a sound from the hall reached them. The next moment a voice said, "Paul?" and Frank Blair appeared in the doorway. He looked disheveled and fatigued, his face white and drawn.

"Oh, it's you," he said, yawning a little. "I heard voices, but I thought you'd left." He paused as his eyes fell on the paper in Gibbons' hands. "What have you got there?" he asked sharply.

"It's your father's will," replied Bethancourt quietly. "The one only Gemma knew about, the one she knew left his fortune to her and not to you. She told you about it, didn't she, today in the garden? But she wouldn't tell you where it was.

She'd promised her grandfather not to. So you killed her, so that no one would ever know. You own the house now—"

He stopped because Frank Blair was crying. "No," he sobbed, "no, it wasn't like that. I never meant to kill her. I never meant to hurt her at all. My God, I have a little girl myself! I never wanted to hurt her. I loved her."

"But you did hurt her," said Bethancourt. "You killed her."

"I didn't mean to, I tell you! But I didn't know the old man had actually made another will. When she told me, all innocence, not even realizing what she was saying—I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it had all been for nothing. I tried to get her to tell me where it was, but she wouldn't. She just wouldn't. I only meant to shake her a little: Just shake her, so she'd see I meant it. And then, oh God, she was dead. She was dead in my hands. Little Gemma. Oh, God, I never meant it. I'd do anything to bring her back. Gemma . . ."

He had broken down completely, huddled against the door frame and weeping uncontrollably. Gibbons rose and went to him, laying a hand on his arm.

"Frank Blair," he said quietly, "I arrest you for the murder of Gemma Blair . . ."

Late on the afternoon of the following day, Phillip Bethancourt lay comfortably sprawled in a deck chair on the Marchbanks' lawn, a gin and tonic at his elbow, his dog sedately and elegantly arranged at his feet. He was looking rather wan, a fact which Jack Gibbons noticed but did not comment on. They had been up half the night at the police station, delivering Frank Blair and then waiting until Superintendent Blake had been routed out of bed and come over so that they could make their statements. The prisoner had become suddenly recalcitrant and demanded a solicitor, something which was not to be gotten at that hour, and so everyone had gone home again. Bethancourt, however, had been up early to drive Marla back to London, leaving Gibbons to cope with explaining to the superintendent why one of his witnesses was unavailable until the late afternoon.

When Bethancourt had returned, he had been hustled over to the Blairs' house to aid Gibbons in pointing out the correct mousehole and, inevitably, to enact a very awkward scene with Paul Blair, who was grief-stricken and angry and grateful all at the same time. Then it was back to the police station and so, at last, to the gin and

tonic and the late afternoon sun on the lawn.

It had been an exhausting twenty-four hours, and now Colonel Marchbanks, in his forthright way, was announcing that the evidence was all wrong.

"It sounds very fishy to me," he said. "I've known old Bill Blair these thirty years and more, I shouldn't wonder, and he never had a barmy day in his life. What would he want to go putting wills in mouseholes for? Damned silly thing to do."

"Presumably he thought it was a good hiding place," said Bethancourt. "And so it was."

"But be reasonable, man! You don't want to hide wills—you want them handy for your solicitor, not shoved into walls."

"But he never meant it to stay there, colonel," put in Gibbons. "That was only temporary, until he'd gotten his solicitor to come and take it. I bet if you care to ask that nurse he had, she'll confirm that he had asked for his solicitor. Meanwhile he wasn't taking any chances that Frank would find it. He'd realized by then, you see, that Frank was completely unscrupulous. He was afraid of him, and he had every right to be."

The colonel snorted while Mrs. Marchbanks asked, "But what do you mean? Surely all he had

to do was call for his solicitor and do the thing properly. Frank couldn't stop that."

"Yes, but look how it all happened," said Bethancourt, sitting up a little. "He's had a stroke and he's more or less bedridden. He's finally come to terms with the idea that his oldest son is a washout. He has a terrific argument with him that morning in which he probably tells him that he plans to change his will. Later that day he decides not to wait for the solicitor. Very likely the argument had left him feeling weak and ill, and he was afraid of having another stroke. He could also have been afraid of what Frank might do to try to stop him. So he writes out the new will himself and has the nurse witness it. She's the only one in the house that can, as she's the only one not mentioned in it. Then he hides it, to be sure that Frank won't find it and destroy it. Gemma was probably there at the time, but he makes her promise not to tell where it is, unless he dies, and then she must tell only her parents. Possibly he cautioned her specifically not to tell Uncle Frank. But he didn't reckon with the fact that she was really too young to understand. When she tells her mother the will's in the mousehole, Diana just thought she was being fanciful and tells her that it's all right, the so-

licitors have it now. Gemma thinks no more about it. Her grandfather has told her that everything will belong to her and her brother, and in fact they both did inherit sizable sums under the old will. What's the difference to a child? The only snag was that he'd told her the house would be hers and Ben's, and under the old will that just wasn't true. That's what finally made Frank realize that there was a second will."

"Well," said the colonel, "I'll admit that makes a bit more sense, although a mousehole still strikes me as a damned odd hiding place. Still, if he hadn't died that night, it would have been all right."

Bethancourt was silent a moment. Then he said, "But he did die that night. Frank couldn't allow him to live."

"What?" cried Mrs. Marchbanks, while the colonel merely sputtered.

"The evidence," put in Gibbons hastily, "is only circumstantial. He'll never be charged. But we've talked to Clara and she admits she knew that Mr. Blair had asked for his solicitor. Not to change his will, but just to make sure his affairs were in order. She can't remember who told her or if she mentioned it to anyone else, but Martha knew as well. They didn't think anything of it."

"Frank, however, knew differently," said Bethancourt grimly. "That night, Benjamin had a nightmare and happened to see his uncle in his grandfather's room. I asked Benjamin today about it. He says Frank was leaving Mr. Blair's bedside with a pillow tucked under his arm. He probably used a pillow from his own room to smother him. I think it's very lucky that Benjamin's only thought was to get to his mother, and that Frank wasn't familiar enough to him yet to be a balm for a bad nightmare."

There was a shocked silence.

"Hanging's not good enough for the fellow," bellowed the colonel.

"I only wish they did still hang them," said Mrs. Marchbanks indignantly. "Do you mean to tell me that such a disgraceful thing will never even come to trial?"

"No," said Gibbons. "There's no real evidence, you see. But he'll be convicted for killing Gemma, and I doubt they'll deal lightly with him."

"I should say not!" said the colonel. "We don't take kindly to child murderers in this county, I'm glad to say. He'll get the maximum penalty, despite all that stuff and nonsense about not meaning to do it."

Bethancourt was suddenly very tired. He rose, a little abruptly, and said that they should be getting off.

"Are you certain you won't stay the night?" asked Mrs. Marchbanks anxiously. "You look awfully tired."

"No, no," said Bethancourt. "Thanks all the same, but I must get Jack back in time to get some sleep and be at work bright and early. Can't get on without him at the Yard, you know. They're very annoyed about his missing today."

Gibbons, about to offer to take the train up, looked at his friend and held his tongue.

They bade farewell and thanks to their hosts and waved goodbye as they pulled out of the drive. They sped through the country, cutting around the village, and out to the A-road. As they turned southward, Gibbons settled back with a sigh and said:

"Well, it was remarkably quick work, Phillip."

"Yes," agreed Bethancourt. "We should be proud of ourselves, I suppose."

"All the same," said Gibbons after a moment, "I can't say I cared much for it. A child dying and all."

"No," said Bethancourt. "Neither did I."

FICTION

As Well To Be Hanged

by Emmy Lou Schenk

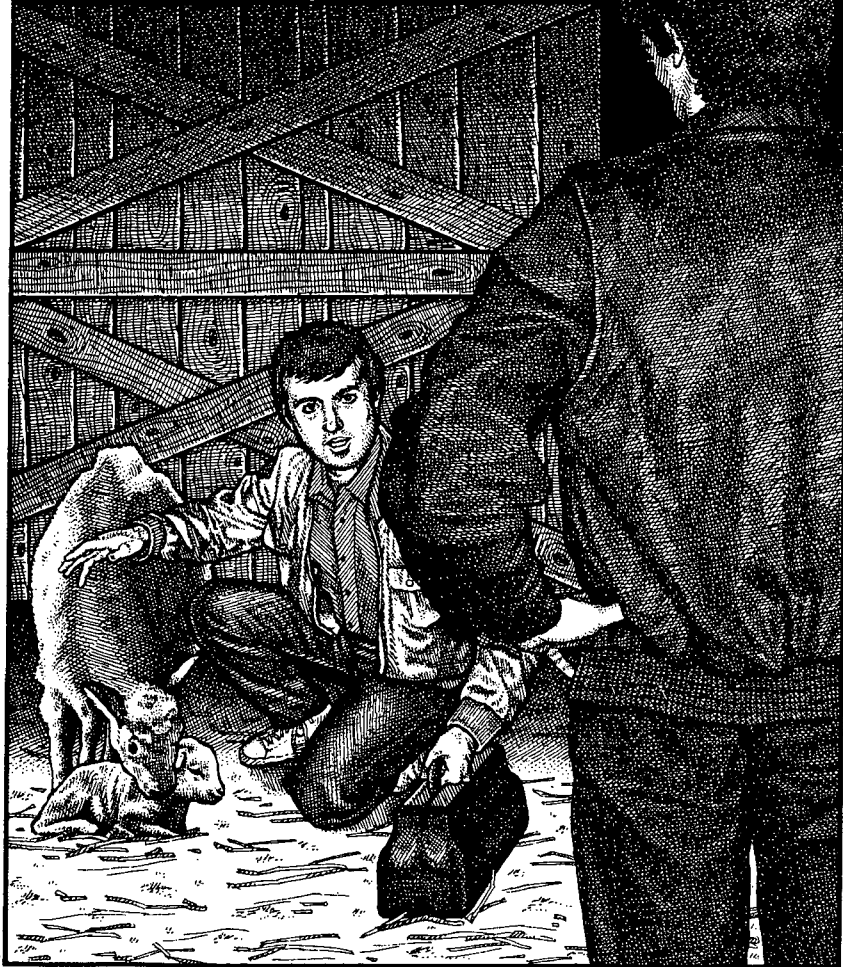


Illustration by Ron Chironna

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Believe me, hearing about a murder from Billy Keedler is no way to start the day. Just being cooped up in a barn with him is bad enough, but that's the veterinary business for you—six fifteen A.M., and him with some weird story about being able to sell a cow but only if she was settled, and the cow dealer coming at seven so would I please shag out there right now and do a pregnancy test.

Fiona had answered the phone.

"Of course Dr. Thiesendorf is here," she'd said, blowing a kiss across the receiver as she handed it to me.

Jumpstarting my stock of professional courtesy, I grudgingly agreed to come, then hung up with a groan.

"What's the matter?" Fiona asked. She had risen from the table and was rinsing out the coffee pot.

Fiona is a fiber artist. She does those woolly wall hangings you see in banks, the kind with strings hanging down and old bones and bits of wood worked in. They look unplanned, but they aren't. She knows exactly how it will come out before she starts. Her work habits are equally precise. Promptly at seven every morning she disappears into an old summer kitchen out back which

she has converted into a studio.

"An emergency pregnancy test," I said, doing my King Kong imitation, shaking my fists over my head, breathing hard through clenched teeth. "I mean, the guy's got to be kidding."

Fiona wrinkled her nose in sympathy.

"Thank you, my love," I said, wondering, as I often do, if I would have been so hot to go to vet school if I'd known how much time I'd be spending up to my armpit at the wrong end of a cow.

"It's this little sweetheart here." Keedler patted the rump of a swaybacked, knock-kneed Holstein, then shook his head sadly. "I suppose you already heard about O'Neil."

"No," I said. "But I imagine I will."

Slipping a plastic sleeve over my arm, I lifted the cow's tail carefully to begin my task.

I knew now why he had called so early. Keedler is the worst gossip in the county, which is saying a lot. Farmers don't get out and around much, but that doesn't mean they don't keep up with the bad news about their neighbors. Around here some go one step further. They engage in brutal competition to get first to the vet with a story.

Even so, it would take some-

thing really juicy to get Keedler to pop for an unneeded pregnancy test.

"About his wife," Keedler said hopefully.

I was probing the cow's uterus. "Wife? Whose wife?"

"Norm O'Neil, you know, up past Newburg. Had about a fifty-cow herd till last year, sold off before the bank got him." Keedler stoked his lower lip with snuff, then spat contemptuously. "Has sheep now. A bunch of Suffolks for meat, and some razzmatazz breed for the wool."

"Sheep, huh."

A short answer, but every time I get in Keedler's barn I remember back when I was first in practice and I told him a cow wasn't pregnant only to have her calve the following week. The SOB had given me the wrong breeding date, on purpose probably so he could forever take digs at my expertise. No doubt this time, though: the uterus was hard as a rock.

"No calf here," I said.

"You sure? You've been known to be wrong."

"Not this time."

"Well, no problem. I'll just say I have this vet who—" He poked me in the ribs, winked slyly, then got back to his real reason for calling me in. "So you haven't heard about O'Neil's old lady, hey?"

"Not since last summer when she took off for someplace—New York, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, New York." Nodding, hopping from one foot to the other, Keedler delivered his coup-de-grace. "And guess what she got for her trouble. She got her head bashed in, that's what."

"Hey, no," I said, almost as shocked as he'd hoped I'd be. "No, I hadn't heard that."

Keedler allowed himself a smirk of victory, then turned sanctimonious. "Sad what the world is coming to these days. The poor woman getting herself murdered like that. Yessir, some Christmas tree farmer up in Vermont found her lying there, spang in the middle of his best blue spruces. Been dead since January, or so they say."

"Do they have any idea who did it?" I didn't have to ask who "they" was. Keedler's son-in-law had recently been elected sheriff.

"Well—" Keedler lowered his voice, as if his butterfat content might drop if the cows overheard. "It could have been anybody because God alone knows what she was doing in New York. Or—" Keedler broke off again, staring at a crack in the cement floor.

"Or what," I said, deciding I might as well have the whole story. As well to be hanged for a sheep as a goat.

Running his tongue between his lower lip and his teeth, Keedler kicked reflectively at a clod of manure. "They say it might have been O'Neil himself. Seems he was behind in his alimony and the wife was after him to sell off his land. A fourth generation farm. Shoot, he'd die first."

"I suppose," I replied thoughtfully, dredging up what I knew about O'Neil—a large man, beefy, quick-tempered, too proud to take his comedown gracefully, not that he was the only farmer to be forced out recently. There'd been three suicides in just the last year—but murder?

"To a man like O'Neil, murder would come easy as mother's milk," Keedler went on, still hopping around, his head cocked to one side like a robin listening for a worm.

Suddenly his fervor was more than I could stand. I wanted to get out into the fresh air. It was spring, but Keedler's barn smelled musty, like maybe his silage had gone sour. "Well, I hope you sell your cow," I said, and turned to go.

"Big help you are."

"Yeah, it's a shame, but there it is. After all," I said, "I can't be wrong all the time."

"No," he said sadly. "I suppose not."

Every barn I set foot in for the rest of the morning was full of talk about the murder. Nobody subscribed to the idea that it had been committed by a person or persons unknown. O'Neil was something of a survivalist, people said. Had a swastika on his barn. Treated women like dirt.

O'Neil was tried and convicted before the morning was out. Over and over I was told that he must have driven out to New York just after Christmas, finagled the wife into the pick-up somehow, then headed north for Vermont where he coshed her with an ordinary two by four, which was found by the body. Only the police hadn't arrested him yet because he swore he hadn't been off the farm for months except to pick up groceries, and so far, there was no evidence to prove otherwise.

"Did they examine the truck?" I asked young Merle Teuscher as I treated a heifer with a severe infection at his father's place.

"Oh, yeah, but it's an old truck. He musta had it six, eight years. So you find something of hers in there. So what?"

"I suppose. How about fingerprints?"

"He probably wore gloves."

"Aw, come on, if he was gone for a week, somebody would

have noticed for sure.”

Merle looked up surprised. “Who said anything about a week?”

“I did. It’d have to be. New York’s a long ways from Wisconsin. You take a couple of days to get there, a day maybe to corner the wife, another day to get up to Vermont. And don’t forget, we had a big blizzard just after Christmas, add a day or two for that. A long time gone, and who took care of his sheep?”

Merle was unconvinced. “He could leave ’em okay. Ain’t like cows where you gotta do chores twice a day, never mind if it’s thirty below, and the barn cleaners froze solid like it did here after the storm. I mean, all you gotta do with sheep is leave enough food around.”

“Yeah, it was sure enough one cold winter,” I said, deciding it was time to change the subject.

Merle was only half right about the sheep, but there’s no point in arguing with a dairyman, particularly one who’d try to explain the neat row of puncture wounds on his cow’s rump by saying the poor old Bossie had tripped on a pitchfork.

Back home for lunch, I complained to Fiona about being overdosed on gossip, but at first she was too immersed in her

own work to pay much attention. At the moment she was working on something we called the droopy blue whale which had been commissioned by a bank in Chicago. Her face was streaked with blue from the indigo she’d used to dye the yarn.

“The thing is giving me fits, Jon,” she said. “Absolute fits, but—” Breaking off in mid-sentence, her eyes widened. “Did you say Norm O’Neil’s wife?”

“You didn’t know her, did you?”

Fiona shook her head. “Not her, no. I—I never met her, but you remember that fleece I bought on Saturday. I bought it from O’Neil.”

I remembered the silvery grey fleece well enough, but hadn’t paid much attention to where it came from. Now, as the import of what she had said sunk in, I felt my heart pound.

“Good God, Fiona. Don’t tell me you went out to O’Neil’s place all by yourself.”

“Well, of course, Jonny. Don’t sound so horrified. It’s all just gossip so far.”

“Yes, but—”

“Yes, but nothing. Besides, I think I did real well, considering it’s the first fleece I ever bought. The fibers are perfect for worsted, and there’s almost no coting or second cuts. All his Lincolns wear these little coats so they don’t get dirty.”

"Do they?" My professional interest was roused although not sufficiently to supplant my anxiety. "He hasn't called us out since he sold off the cows."

"Well, he takes good care of them, his wool sheep anyway. Looks after them like they were his children."

Except that the O'Neils had no children. Someone had told me that in a rather accusatory way this morning. Funny, I'd forgotten who. Biting my lip, I looked across the table. Fiona was hunched over her sandwich.

Well, it wasn't just her biological clock that was ticking. I wanted a child, too, maybe just as much as she did. Probably her gyn was right. It wouldn't hurt if I went in for a few tests, but—dammit, what would a guy like Keedler say if he knew?

Forestalling her inevitable question, I said quickly, "I know, honey. I'll give the doctor a call. I promise. Say, did you know you've got some of that blue yarn in your hair?"

"Don't change the subject, Jonny. This is important."

"Well, it's important to me, too."

And it was, except—except what? A bull that doesn't produce gets ground up into hamburger. My chest tight, I went to the refrigerator and poured

myself another glass of milk. One pregnancy test after another.

"I know it is, Jon," Fiona bit her lip. "You will go to the doctor, won't you? Please."

"Sure, honey," I said, forcing a smile to show I meant it. Fiona was my life, and I hated myself for lying to her. Worse, for my inability to do what she wanted.

Fiona smiled. "Do you think it will take long? For the police to find out if O'Neil did it, I mean."

"I wouldn't think so. After all, if he's lying, somebody's bound to know."

"But that's the funny thing," said Barry Boomhower, a few mornings later.

"Nobody does know."

Barry and I were enjoying a second cup of coffee in Gunther's Café. Most of Freiburg's restaurants have become gentrified since the freeway went through, but not Gunther's—dusty Venetian blinds, lots of chrome, booths swaddled in marbled green plastic. The place smells of strong coffee and the best hash browns in southeast Wisconsin. Maybe the whole state.

Barry and I are the same age; thirty-four. He has broad shoulders, and an attitude of unshakable confidence. A bit

young, people say, but by God, he makes an impressive chief of police. Like me, he grew up here. We played on the same high school football team.

"But, Barry, how come nobody knows?" I signaled the waitress for a refill. "Unleaded this time, please," I told her, because Fiona had once suggested too much caffeine might be part of the baby problem. There was no scientific evidence for that, but conception is a funny thing. Too much nitrogen in the water makes cows abort. Who would have thought that fifty years ago?

"Beats me." Barry held up his cup, too. "It doesn't make sense."

"What does, these days?" When the waitress had gone, I added, "Say, should we be talking about this?"

"Sure, it's not my case. The thing is all mixed up between Vermont and New York and the D.A.'s office here. Only it's the FBI mostly, and what do they care?"

"It's their job to care, isn't it?"

"Sure, but anybody could have done it. Who knows? She was a lot younger than O'Neil. Maybe she had a boyfriend or something. She'd only been in New York for a few months and she wasn't working anyplace. For God's sake, until they found her, nobody even knew she was missing."

"Not even her lawyer?"

"Aw, you know how they are. A client doesn't call in for a few months, they just figure they must have done something right so the client has nothing to bitch about."

"What's O'Neil say?"

"Only that she was after him for support, so he sent her a check in December, to a post office box. She wouldn't give him her address. Anyway, the check never cleared the bank, so he took that as a sign from heaven not to send her any more. Just like the lawyers. Glad to have her off his back."

"No phone calls?"

"He said she called him all the time at first, from a pay phone. And then she stopped, and so what."

"It's funny, though, he didn't even know where she lived. It sort of proves his case, doesn't it."

"Only if he's telling the truth, Jon, and who knows about that?"

"Yeah, I suppose. What about her family?"

"Not much. Her dad's dead, and her mother's in a nursing home up in Eau Claire. Alzheimer's, I guess."

"She must have had some friends."

"None we can find. She wasn't from around here, and he didn't let her out much, which is maybe why she finally packed off like

she did. Of course, she had no kids to keep her from going."

I sighed. Fiona and Mrs. O'Neil didn't have much in common, but they had that. Had Mrs. O'Neil ever tried to get her husband to see a doctor? I was wondering if it would help to talk it out with Barry when a beeper went off. Both of us felt for our waistbands.

"Shoot," I said, pushing my chair back from the table. "That's me."

I headed for the pay phone. The dispatcher told me a sheep farmer named O'Neil wanted me out right away. "Why me?" I asked.

"One of his ewes is having a problem lambing," she replied staunchly. Brenda has been with our office since it was founded thirty years back. She's convinced no one in their right mind would ever call anywhere else.

Barry whistled when I told him. "Speak of the devil, hey?"

"Yeah, you want me to nose around some, see what I can find out."

"Don't be silly, Jon. The man could be dangerous."

"I'm joking," I replied, dropping a pile of loose change on the table. "I'm a vet, not a detective, for God's sake."

Brenda notwithstanding, as I drove out to O'Neil's, I found

myself wondering why he had called. Usually, if a ewe had trouble lambing, the owner threw her in the back of a truck and brought her in to the office. This not only saves the cost of an on-site visit but also means that a Caesarian, if necessary, can be performed under controlled conditions.

But this would be O'Neil's first lambing. Perhaps he didn't know that.

The farm wasn't easy to find. A side road, and then another side road, and then a narrow gravel driveway that ran about a quarter of a mile over a heavily wooded hill. Beautiful, but isolated. No wonder the neighbors hadn't noticed O'Neil's absence.

But that was unfair. Perhaps he'd been there all along, just as he said.

"It's twins, I think," said O'Neil. He was in his mid-forties, bigger than I had remembered, with a barrel chest and long sinewy arms. Dark curly hair, handsome in a way, if you could get past the defensive squint. "But they ain't coming out right."

A section of the old cow barn had been fenced off as a lambing shed. It seemed reasonably neat and clean, lots of straw anyway. If there was a swastika, I sure didn't see it.

The ewe had been sheared before lambing, also a proper procedure, as the stress of birthing can weaken the fibers in the fleece.

The sheep lay on her side, looking resigned as sheep generally do. One tiny hoof protruded from her vagina.

"Has she been like this long?" I asked.

"How should I know," O'Neil replied curtly. "I don't sleep out here." He frowned. "Your name is Thiesendorf, isn't it? I guess it was your wife bought a fleece here last week."

"She did indeed." I knelt to examine the ewe. There seemed to be no particular problem, outside of an awkward presentation.

"I—uh—I'd like to get it back."

"Get what back?"

"The fleece. I mean, it was a mistake. I shouldn't of sold it. Have a market, wants all of them. I'd come get it myself only I can't leave here during lambing."

The lamb was slipping out now. The ewe let out a sigh that sounded almost joyful. For a sheep anyway.

"Only one here," I said. "What made you think it was twins?"

"Twins? I don't know. I just thought . . . well, I'm new at this, and these damn things are so easy to . . . God, they're stupid."

The ewe was licking her lamb, pushing it gently to its feet. O'Neil looked at her angrily, as if she were somehow responsible for his wife's death.

"I—I was sorry to hear about your wife," I said, feeling that some expression of regret was necessary.

O'Neil shrugged. "Her own fault. I told her . . . well, never mind that. It's none of your business."

So much for regret, I thought, getting to my feet. "Well, if you have no other problems, I'll be on my way."

"Good." O'Neil was smiling now, but his eyes were hard. Or was it merely the squint? "You tell your wife about that fleece now."

"I'll do better than that. I'll bring it out myself. She'll be disappointed, though. She was very pleased with it, has it all scoured and everything. She was just getting ready to card."

"Oh, but she hasn't yet. That's lucky. I mean, like I said, there's this buyer, and . . . well, you see how it is."

O'Neil was herding me out of the lambing shed and toward my truck. Somewhere off behind the barn there was a fire. I wrinkled my nose.

"Hey, man, whatever you're burning, it sure smells funny."

O'Neil's eyes narrowed even as his smile grew broader.

"Trash. Saves the cost of garbage pickup. But you vets are so rich, you wouldn't understand about that."

The usual smart-ass needling. Vets get used to it. They better, anyway.

"I don't burn much myself," I said quickly. "Just the small bills. Otherwise the house gets so filled up you can't hardly find a place to sit."

O'Neil threw up his hands in a parody of shock. "You got me that time," he said, laughing as I climbed into the truck and shut the door. Not near as bad a guy as people made out. Better than Keedler anyway.

But as I wended my way down the long driveway, I found myself wondering why he had called. Okay, so he was inexperienced with sheep, but that presentation had been ludicrously normal.

And why did he want that fleece back? A buyer indeed. I didn't like it—none of it. By the time I reached the blacktop, I'd decided two things. One was that the gossip was getting to me, and the other was that I was going to stop by the house, pick up the fleece, and take the damn thing back to him right now.

Wondering what had set my teeth so on edge, I snapped off both the truck radio and my beeper, and headed for home.

"Fiona? Honey, where are you?"

No answer. The studio was empty. I looked around, three looms, the half done droopy blue whale suspended from a series of hooks along one wall, shelves full of yarn, her new spinning wheel gleaming in a shaft of bright spring sun, nearby the basket of white rolags she had used for practice.

But no Fiona.

Nothing to worry about, I told myself. Just because she rarely left the house in the morning didn't mean she couldn't. Maybe she had an appointment, or a class I'd forgotten about.

Only it wasn't that she rarely left. She *never* left. My mornings are sacred, she said. The yarn takes on a mind of its own if you leave it too long.

But she was gone now, and so was the fleece.

Looking around frantically, I slapped my hand to my forehead. What a jerk I was. She had done the scouring in the basement set tubs, and that's where she probably was. Down in the basement. I should have checked there first.

But the basement was as barren as the studio. The rack where she had hung the fleece to dry stood empty, and somehow accusatory.

Forcing myself to remain

calm, I went back up the stairs and into the kitchen. Really, there was no reason to worry. Probably she'd run down to the yarn shop for something, a needle had broken perhaps, or she'd decided she needed some new color of yarn.

And yet—and yet was this how O'Neil had felt when he found out his wife had cut out for New York?

But Fiona wouldn't do that. Not even if I hadn't made the appointment with the doctor like I'd said. I shivered, seeing as always the countless birthings I had participated in. Vets never get called till there's trouble, a calf bed put out, or a breech presentation, the small body choking in its mother's feces.

The sudden ringing of the phone was like in the movies, where the guy is five hours late, and the wife hears a knock at the door, and everybody knows it's going to be the police with the bad news. Taking a deep breath, I picked up the receiver. "Thiesendorf here."

"Oh, doctor, what a relief." Not the police after all. The office dispatcher. "You see, Dr. Brandenburg called in with the flu, and something's wrong with your radio. And, oh look, there's a message from Mrs. Thiesendorf, too." There was a rustle of paper. "She said if you called in

we should tell you to get your own lunch."

"Fine, Brenda, but where was she going? Did she say?"

"Not to me. I didn't talk to her."

"Well, dammit, who did?"

"Gee, Dr. Thiesendorf, I'll try to find out." Staring at the receiver, I did my best not to hyperventilate while Brenda called around the office. Finally she came back on the line. "Mary says it had to do with a fleece she bought. It broke or something so she was going to exchange it."

I didn't say thank you or goodbye. I don't even know if I hung up the phone. I was out of the house and into the truck in less time than it takes to tell it.

It's about a half hour drive to O'Neil's. I expect I made it in fifteen minutes. I should have used the time to think out what I would do when I arrived, but all I could think about was Fiona. Not until I turned into O'Neil's drive did I ask myself, what if she's not here?

Well, in point of fact, she had probably already come and gone. That made it easy. I'd just ask him if my wife had come along with the fleece, and if he said, "Yes," there'd be no problem. If he said, "No, not yet," I'd go

wait at the end of the driveway till she got there. Simple.

So why was I sweating like a stuck pig?

I drove slowly up the driveway, hoping somehow to see Fiona's blue van come rattling toward me. No luck.

As I crested the hill, I stopped to look, then heaved a sigh of relief. Not here yet.

Not wanting to let O'Neil know I had come, I shifted into reverse. I would have to back up fifty feet or so before I could turn. The drive was too narrow and closely lined with trees on both sides.

I had moved less than ten feet when a small fork lift loader came round the bend behind me.

O'Neil could have backed up and let me through, but he didn't. He just waved, which made sense, of course, as I'd told him I'd come back with the fleece.

I waved back, a sick grin on my face, then headed for the turnaround down by the barn.

O'Neil followed me down but stopped while the loader was still on the treelined section of the drive. Was he trying to trap me?

"Hi there," I called, but didn't get out of the truck so after a moment or two, he shut off the loader, came over.

"Dr. Thiesendorf," he said,

squinting even more than usual in the bright sun. "That didn't take long. Did you bring the fleece?"

So Fiona hadn't gotten here yet. Good.

Only I didn't have it either, so why was I there?

"Well, uh, no, I didn't bring it, but I called her, my wife, I mean. She's bringing it out, and, uh, I told her I'd meet her here, take her to lunch at The Painted Lady in Newburg. It's a new place. They say it's really good. Have you been there?"

"I don't get out much."

"Yeah, so they say. So, well, I guess Fiona didn't get here yet, then?"

There was a pause. "No," he said. "Not yet."

The pause lasted barely a microsecond, but it jarred me. Vets are trained to be good observers. They have to be. Their patients can't tell them where it hurts.

"That's funny," I said, trying to sort out my thoughts. "I talked to her nearly an hour ago. She said she'd leave right away. Well, that's women for you."

There was another pause, a momentary muscle spasm along his jaw, then O'Neil slapped his hand on his thigh, and grinned. "Yeah, women. Dumber than sheep mostly."

Inwardly apologizing to Fiona,

I laughed heartily even as I considered his reaction. Why the pauses? For all he knew, I'd spent the rest of the morning at a farm just down the road. There was no reason why I couldn't have called Fiona, told her about the fleece, and made a plan to meet her here.

Only how many men ask their wives to meet them at the home of a suspected murderer?

Well, that explained the pauses anyway. The man must think I was nuts.

Or lying.

Because Fiona had left before I had a chance to tell her he wanted the fleece back.

"Maybe she went to the restaurant first," I said, wondering for the first time why she would want to exchange it.

There was another of those pauses, then he smiled. "That's probably it," he said.

"Yeah. Well, if she comes, you tell her where I am."

"Will do." Turning on his heel, he headed back to the loader.

I watched him. He had on bluejeans, a faded camo jacket, grey leather gloves. A hot day for gloves, I thought, and then saw the strand of blue yarn, hanging from his collar.

I wasn't the only one who was lying. Fiona had already been here. Was probably still here.

O'Neil had heaved himself into the seat of the loader, was

driving it down the hill and into the turnaround.

What should I do? Drive next door and call the sheriff?

No, he'd have no search warrant. All he could do was what I'd already done, ask a few questions, then leave.

There was no point in looking for help. It was up to me.

Slamming the truck into four wheel drive, I whirled it around and drove straight at the loader, right up over the forks, pushing him backwards till the loader was pinned against the barn.

O'Neil teetered on the seat, both eyes squinting in anger. "What's the matter with you?" he yelled. "You crazy or something?"

I stuck my head out the window. "What did you do with her, O'Neil," I said. "Where is my wife?"

He was breathing hard. I could see his chest heaving, could almost smell his terror. It was obvious he wanted to get off the loader, but knew I'd run him down if he did.

I inched the truck forward. The siding on the barn bent in. In another moment it would come down on him. On me, too, perhaps.

He was screaming now. "You're crazy. Crazy!"

His words burned into my mind. He was right. I was acting like a madman. A bit of blue yarn was hardly enough to jus-

tify smashing the man's barn.

Except the yarn wasn't the only clue that he was lying. There was his unnecessary call. The fire. The fleece. Yes, most of all, the fleece.

But I still wasn't thinking clearly. If I had been, I would never have gotten out of the truck, would never have had the strength to haul him off the loader.

"You killed your wife," I said, grabbing him by the shoulders, shaking him like a pit bull.

"And I can prove it."

"No," he said. "No."

Then suddenly he shut his eyes. The weight in my hands seemed to evaporate as the fight went out of him.

"It's a family farm," he said, tears streaming down his cheeks. "Four generations, and I lost it."

"That doesn't give you the right to kill. Not your wife, not mine either."

"I didn't. She's up in the tool shed. You came too soon."

It's amazing what you can do when you are really angry. When I hit him he dropped like a sack of meal.

Fiona was lying on the floor, her hands tied behind her, her feet bound.

"I thought I heard you out there," she said slowly, taking a breath between each word. "I yelled and yelled, but the motors were running, and—and,

oh, Jonny, he was going to bury me under those hay bales up on the hill."

I don't know how long it took to untie her, longer than it should have, as my hands were shaking and I had to leave off every so often to hold her, and kiss her, and tell her everything was all right now. Somewhere in the middle of untangling the knots around her ankles, I found myself saying I had decided to see the doctor.

Fiona's face lit up like a mirror to the sun. She could tell from my voice, I guess, that I wasn't merely mouthing another promise.

"I love you, Jonny," she said, as we stumbled to our feet. We kissed, hard and long, then went down to the farmhouse to call the sheriff.

Keedler's son-in-law. The gossipy old coot would really have fun with this one.

Barry and I met for coffee at Gunther's a few days later. By that time the police had picked up O'Neil, and he had confessed. He would be charged with first degree murder, though to my mind the killing was done less from coldblooded premeditation than from shame and frustration.

There was no way to condone what he'd done. Still, I kept thinking how I'd fought going

to the doctor, not through logic but from fear of what people might think if they found out I couldn't father a child.

Silly. It would no more be my fault than it was O'Neil's that he'd been forced out of dairying. Times change, and not all farmers are able to change with them.

"That doesn't excuse him for taking it out on his wife," Barry said, when I tried to explain.

And of course he was right.

"But what I don't understand," he went on, "is that business about the fleece. Just because it kept breaking when Fiona tried to card."

"Stress," I replied. "When sheep are stressed, it shows up in the wool. You see, when O'Neil took off for New York, he left his flock penned up outside with enough food for a week, but then there was that blizzard, and the food got buried in the snow. By the time he got back a couple of sheep were dead, and the others near so."

"So that's why he burned the fleeces."

"Yes, all the fibers would break at the same length."

"You couldn't convict a guy on that."

"Maybe not, but he couldn't chance it. Only he was too old fashioned to call Fiona himself. I mean, a guy like him doesn't talk business with a mere woman. He tells the husband so he can *order* her to do it."

"Like I always say, it doesn't pay to be macho." Leaning back from the counter, Barry beat apeline on his chest.

"Yeah, but then half an hour later Fiona shows up complaining about breakage. He knew it only was a matter of time before I put two and two together."

"Would you have?"

"I doubt it."

Barry nodded. "He hadn't really lost the farm, either, only the dairying end of it, and there was no way his wife could force him sell off. I mean, there was no logic to it. He knew people would talk, and he freaked out."

"People do that sometimes," I said. But I could hardly wait for my next call to Keedler's.

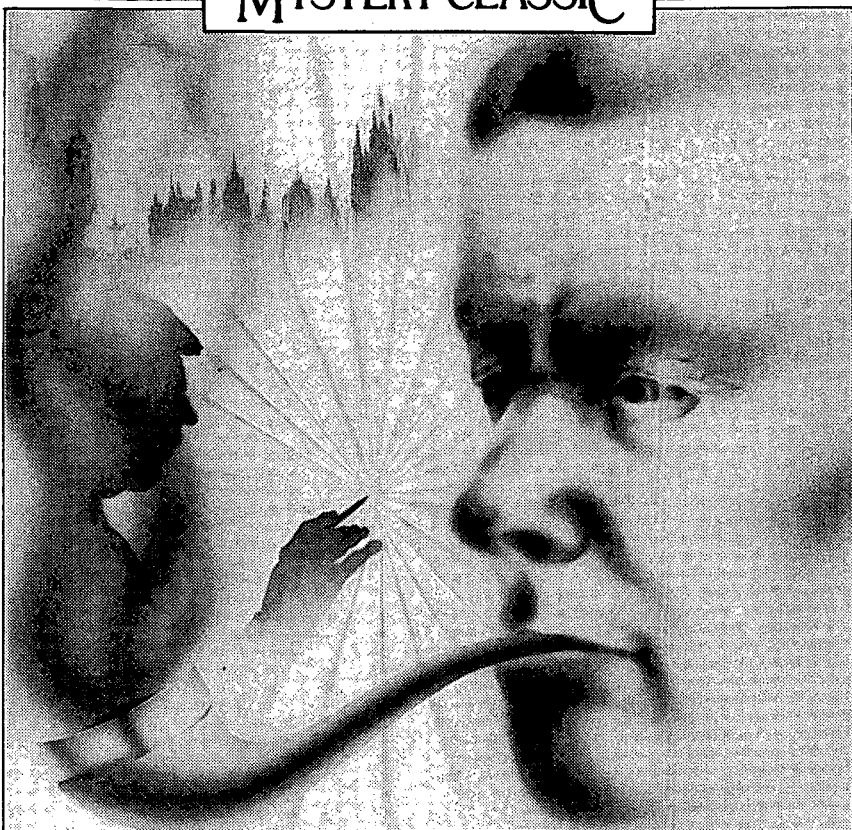
"Hey, man," I'd say. "Did you know I'm going to be a father?"

And he'd say, "Yeah, when?"

"Funny you'd ask," I'd reply.

"I mean, who knows better than you how much trouble I have with pregnancy checks?"

MYSTERY CLASSIC



The Case of the Dixon Torpedo

by Arthur Morrison

Hewitt was very apt, in conversation, to dwell upon the many curious chances and coincidences that he had observed, not only in connection with his own cases, but also in matters dealt with by the official police, with whom he was on terms of pretty regular and, indeed, friendly acquaintanceship. He had told me many an anecdote of singular happenings to Scotland Yard officials with whom he had exchanged experiences. Of Inspector Nettings, for instance, who spent many weary months in a search for a man wanted by the American government, and in the end found, by the merest accident (a misdirected call), that the man had been lodging next door to himself the whole of the time; just as ignorant, of course, as was the inspector himself as to the enemy at the other side of the party-wall. Also of another inspector, whose name I cannot recall, who having been given rather meager and insufficient details of a man whom he anticipated having great difficulty in finding, went straight down the stairs of the office where he had received instructions, and actually *fell over* the man near the door, where he had stooped down to tie his shoelace! There were cases, too, in which, when a great and notorious crime had been committed and various persons had been arrested on suspicion, some were found among them who had long been badly wanted for some other crime altogether. Many criminals had met their deserts by venturing out of their own particular line of crime into another: often a man who got into trouble over something comparatively small found himself in for a startlingly larger trouble, the result of some previous misdeed that otherwise would have gone unpunished. The rouble note-forger, Mirsky, might never have been handed over to the Russian authorities had he confined his genius to forgery alone. It was generally supposed at the time of his extradition that he had communicated with the Russian embassy, with a view to giving himself up—a foolish proceeding on his part, it would seem, since his whereabouts, indeed, even his identity as the forger, had not been suspected. He *had* communicated with the Russian embassy, it is true, but for quite a different purpose, as Martin Hewitt well understood at the time. What that purpose was is now for the first time published.

The time was half past one in the afternoon, and Hewitt sat in his inner office examining and comparing the handwriting of two letters by the aid of a large lens. He put down the lens and glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece with a premonition of lunch; and as he did so his clerk quietly entered the room with one of those

printed slips which were kept for the announcement of unknown visitors. It was filled up in a hasty and almost illegible hand thus:

Name of visitor: *F. Graham Dixon.*

Address: *Chancery Lane.*

Business: *Private and urgent.*

"Show Mr. Dixon in," said Martin Hewitt.

Mr. Dixon was a gaunt, worn-looking man of fifty or so, well although rather carelessly dressed, and carrying in his strong though drawn face and dullish eyes the look that characterizes the lifelong strenuous brainworker. He leaned forward anxiously in the chair which Hewitt offered him, and told his story with a great deal of very natural agitation.

"You may possibly have heard, Mr. Hewitt—I know there are rumors—of the new locomotive torpedo which the government is about adopting; it is, in fact, the Dixon torpedo, my own invention; and in every respect—not merely in my own opinion, but in that of the government experts—by far the most efficient and certain yet produced. It will travel at least four hundred yards farther than any torpedo now made, with perfect accuracy of aim (a very great desideratum, let me tell you), and will carry an unprecedentedly heavy charge. There are other advantages, speed, simple discharge, and so forth, that I needn't bother you about. The machine is the result of many years of work and disappointment, and its design has only been arrived at by a careful balancing of principles and means, which are expressed on the only four existing sets of drawings. The whole thing, I need hardly tell you, is a profound secret, and you may judge of my present state of mind when I tell you that one set of drawings has been stolen."

"From your house?"

"From my office, in Chancery Lane, this morning. The four sets of drawings were distributed thus: Two were at the Admiralty Office, one being a finished set on thick paper, and the other a set of tracings therefrom; and the other two were at my own office, one being a penciled set, uncolored—a sort of finished draft, you understand—and the other a set of tracings similar to those at the Admiralty. It is this last set that has gone. The two sets were kept together in one drawer in my room. Both were there at ten this morning, of that I am sure, for I had to go to that very drawer for something else, when I first arrived. But at twelve the tracings had vanished."

"You suspect somebody, probably?"

"I cannot. It is a most extraordinary thing. Nobody had left the office (except myself, and then only to come to you) since ten this morning, and there has been no visitor. And yet the drawings are gone!"

"But have you searched the place?"

"Of course I have. It was twelve o'clock when I first discovered my loss, and I have been turning the place upside down ever since—I and my assistants. Every drawer has been emptied, every desk and table turned over, the very carpet and linoleum have been taken up, but there is not a sign of the drawings. My men even insisted on turning all their pockets inside out, although I never for a moment suspected either of them, and it would take a pretty big pocket to hold the drawings, doubled up as small as they might be."

"You say your men—there are two, I understand—had neither left the office?"

"Neither; and they are both staying in now. Worsfold suggested that it would be more satisfactory if they did not leave till something was done towards clearing the mystery up, and although, as I have said, I don't suspect either in the least, I acquiesced."

"Just so. Now—I am assuming that you wish me to undertake the recovery of these drawings?"

The engineer nodded hastily.

"Very good; I will go round to your office. But first perhaps you can tell me something about your assistants; something it might be awkward to tell me in their presence, you know. Mr. Worsfold, for instance?"

"He is my draftsman—a very excellent and intelligent man, a very smart man, indeed, and, I feel sure, quite beyond suspicion. He has prepared many important drawings for me (he has been with me nearly ten years now), and I have always found him trustworthy. But, of course, the temptation in this case would be enormous. Still, I cannot suspect Worsfold. Indeed, how can I suspect anybody in the circumstances?"

"The other, now?"

"His name's Ritter. He is merely a tracer, not a fully skilled draftsman. He is quite a decent young fellow, and I have had him two years. I don't consider him particularly smart, or he would have learned a little more of the business by this time. But I don't see the least reason to suspect him. As I said before, I can't reasonably suspect anybody."

"Very well; we will get to Chancery Lane now, if you please, and you can tell me more as we go."

"I have a cab waiting. What else can I tell you?"

"I understand the position to be succinctly this: the drawings were in the office when you arrived. Nobody came out, and nobody went in; and yet they vanished. Is that so?"

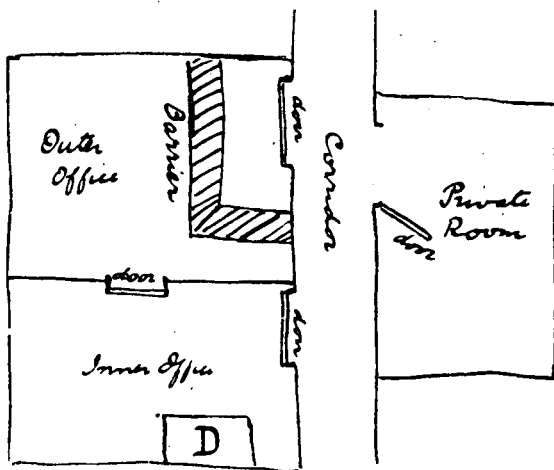
"That is so. When I say that absolutely nobody came in, of course I except the postman. He brought a couple of letters during the morning. I mean that absolutely nobody came past the barrier in the outer office—the usual thing, you know, like a counter, with a frame of ground glass over it."

"I quite understand that. But I think you said that the drawings were in a drawer in your *own* room—not the outer office, where the draftsmen are, I presume?"

"That is the case. It is an inner room, or, rather, a room parallel with the other, and communicating with it; just as your own room is, which we have just left."

"But then, you say you never left your office, and yet the drawings vanished—apparently by some unseen agency—while you were there, in the room?"

"Let me explain more clearly." The cab was bowling smoothly along the Strand, and the engineer took out a pocketbook and pencil. "I fear," he proceeded, "that I am a little confused in my explanation—I am naturally rather agitated. As you will see presently, my offices consist of three rooms, two at one side of a corridor, and the other opposite: thus." He made a rapid pencil sketch.



"In the outer office my men usually work. In the inner office I work myself. These rooms communicate, as you see, by a door. Our ordinary way in and out of the place is by the door of the outer office leading into the corridor, and we first pass through the usual lifting flap in the barrier. The door leading from the *inner* office to the corridor is always kept locked on the inside, and I don't suppose I unlock it once in three months. It has not been unlocked all the morning. The drawer in which the missing drawings were kept, and in which I saw them at ten o'clock this morning, is at the place marked D—it is a large chest of shallow drawers, in which the plans lie flat."

"I quite understand. Then there is the private room opposite. What of that?"

"That is a sort of private sitting room that I rarely use, except for business interviews of a very private nature. When I said I never left my office I did not mean that I never stirred out of the inner office. I was about in one room and another, both the outer and the inner offices, and once I went into the private room for five minutes, but nobody came either in or out of any of the rooms at that time, for the door of the private room was wide open and I was standing at the bookcase (I had gone to consult a book), just inside the office, with a full view of the doors opposite. Indeed, Worsfold was at the door of the outer office most of the short time. He came to ask me a question."

"Well," Hewitt replied, "it all comes to the simple first statement. You know that nobody left the place or arrived, except the postman, who couldn't get near the drawings, and yet the drawings went. Is this your office?"

The cab had stopped before a large stone building. Mr. Dixon alighted and led the way to the first floor. Hewitt took a casual glance around each of the three rooms.

There was a sort of door in the frame of ground glass over the barrier, to admit of speech with visitors. This door Hewitt pushed wide open, and left so.

He and the engineer went into the inner office. "Would you like to ask Worsfold and Ritter any questions?" Mr. Dixon inquired.

"Presently. Those are their coats, I take it, hanging just to the right of the outer office door, over the umbrella stand?"

"Yes, those are all their things—coats, hats, stick, and umbrella."

"And those coats were searched, you say?"

"Yes."

"And this is the drawer—thoroughly searched, of course?"

"Oh, certainly, every drawer was taken out and turned over."

"Well, of course, I must assume you made no mistake in your hunt. Now tell me, did anybody know where these plans were, beyond yourself and your two men?"

"As far as I can tell, not a soul."

"You don't keep an office boy?"

"No. There would be nothing for him to do except to post a letter now and again, which Ritter does quite well for."

"As you are quite sure that the drawings were there at ten o'clock, perhaps the thing scarcely matters. But I may as well know if your men have keys to the office?"

"Neither. I have patent locks to each door and I keep all the keys myself. If Worsfold or Ritter arrive before me in the morning, they have to wait to be let in; and I am always present myself when the rooms are cleaned. I have not neglected precautions, you see."

"No. I suppose the object of the theft—assuming it is a theft—is pretty plain: the thief would offer the drawings for sale to some foreign government?"

"Of course. They would probably command a great sum. I have been looking, as I need hardly tell you, to that invention to secure me a very large fortune, and I shall be ruined, indeed, if the design is taken abroad. I am under the strictest engagements to secrecy with the admiralty, and not only should I lose all my labor, but I should lose all the confidence reposed in me at headquarters—should, in fact, be subject to penalties for breach of contract, and my career stopped forever. I cannot tell you what a serious business this is for me. If you cannot help me, the consequences will be terrible. Bad for the service of the country, too, of course."

"Of course. Now tell me this. It would, I take it, be necessary for the thief to *exhibit* these drawings to anybody anxious to buy the secret—I mean, he couldn't describe the invention by word of mouth?"

"Oh, no, that would be impossible. The drawings are of the most complicated description, and full of figures upon which the whole thing depends. Indeed, one would have to be a skilled expert properly to appreciate the design at all. Various principles of hydrostatics, chemistry, electricity, and pneumatics are most delicately manipulated and adjusted, and the smallest error or omission in any part would upset the whole. No, the drawings are necessary to the thing, and they are gone."

At this moment the door of the outer office was heard to open, and somebody entered. The door between the two offices was ajar,

and Hewitt could see right through to the glass door left open over the barrier, and into the space beyond. A well-dressed, dark, bushy-bearded man stood there carrying a handbag, which he placed on the ledge before him. Hewitt raised his hand to enjoin silence. The man spoke in a rather high-pitched voice and with a slight accent. "Is Mr. Dixon now within?" he asked.

"He is engaged," answered one of the draftsmen; "very particularly engaged. I'm afraid you won't be able to see him this afternoon. Can I give him any message?"

"This is two—the second time I have come today. Not two hours ago Mr. Dixon himself tells me to call again. I have a very important—very excellent steam packing to show him that is very cheap and the best of the market." The man tapped his bag. "I have just taken orders from the largest railway companies. Cannot I see him, for one second only? I will not detain him."

"Really, I'm sure you can't this afternoon—he isn't seeing anybody. But if you'll leave your name—"

"My name is Hunter; but what the good of that? He ask me to call a little later and I come, and now he is engaged. It is a very great pity." And the man snatched up his bag and walking stick and stalked off indignantly.

Hewitt stood still, gazing through the small aperture in the doorway.

"You'd scarcely expect a man with such a name as Hunter to talk with that accent, would you?" he observed musingly. "It isn't a French accent, nor a German; but it seems foreign. You don't happen to know him, I suppose?"

"No, I don't. He called here about half past twelve, just while we were in the middle of our search and I was frantic over the loss of the drawings. I was in the outer office myself, and told him to call later. I have lots of agents here, anxious to sell all sorts of engineering appliances. But what will you do now? Shall you see my men?"

"I think," said Hewitt, rising, "I think I'll get you to question them yourself."

"Myself?"

"Yes, I have a reason. Will you trust me with the key of the private room opposite? I will go over there for a little, while you talk to your men in this room. Bring them in here and shut the door—I can look after the office from across the corridor, you know. Ask them each to detail his exact movements about the office this morning, and get them to recall each visitor who has been here.

from the beginning of the week. I'll let you know the reason of this later. Come across to me in a few minutes."

Hewitt took the key and passed through the outer office into the corridor.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Dixon, having questioned his draftsmen, followed him. He found Hewitt standing before the table in the private room, on which lay several drawings on tracing paper.

"See here, Mr. Dixon," said Hewitt, "I think these are the drawings you are anxious about?"

The engineer sprang toward them with a cry of delight. "Why, yes, yes," he exclaimed, turning them over, "every one of them. But where—how—they must have been in the place after all, then? What a fool I have been!"

Hewitt shook his head. "I'm afraid you're not quite so lucky as you think, Mr. Dixon," he said. "These drawings have most certainly been out of the house for a little while. Never mind now—we'll talk of that after. There is no time to lose. Tell me, how long would it take a good draftsman to copy them?"

"They couldn't possibly be traced over properly in less than two or two and a half long days of very hard work," Dixon replied, with eagerness.

"Ah! then, it is as I feared. These tracings have been photographed, Mr. Dixon, and our task is one of every possible difficulty. If they had been copied in the ordinary way, one might hope to get hold of the copy. But photography upsets everything. Copies can be multiplied with such amazing facility that, once the thief gets a decent start, it is almost hopeless to checkmate him. The only chance is to get at the negatives before copies are made. I must act at once; and I fear, between ourselves, it may be necessary for me to step very distinctly over the line of the law in the matter. You see, to get at those negatives may involve something very like housebreaking. There must be no delay—no waiting for legal procedure—or the mischief is done. Indeed, I very much question whether you have any legal remedy, strictly speaking."

"Mr. Hewitt, I implore you, do what you can. I need not say that all I have is at your disposal. I will guarantee to hold you harmless for anything that may happen. But do, I entreat you, do everything possible. Think of what the consequences may be!"

"Well, yes, so I do," Hewitt remarked, with a smile. "The consequences to me, if I were charged with housebreaking, might be something that no amount of guarantee could mitigate. However, I will do what I can, if only from patriotic motives. Now, I must

see your tracer, Ritter. He is the traitor in the camp."
"Ritter? But how?"

"Never mind that now. You are upset and agitated, and had better not know more than necessary for a little while, in case you say or do something unguarded. With Ritter I must take a deep course; what I don't know I must appear to know, and that will seem more likely to him if I disclaim acquaintance with what I do know. But first put these tracings safely away out of sight."

Dixon slipped them behind his bookcase.

"Now," Hewitt pursued, "call Mr. Worsfold and give him something to do that will keep him in the inner office across the way, and tell him to send Ritter here."

Mr. Dixon called his chief draftsman and requested him to put in order the drawings in the drawers of the inner room that had been disarranged by the search, and to send Ritter, as Hewitt had suggested.

Ritter walked into the private room with an air of respectful attention. He was a puffy-faced, unhealthy-looking young man, with very small eyes and a loose, mobile mouth.

"Sit down, Mr. Ritter," Hewitt said, in a stern voice. "Your recent transactions with your friend, Mr. Hunter, are well known both to Mr. Dixon and myself."

Ritter, who had at first leaned easily back in his chair, started forward at this, and paled.

"You are surprised, I observe; but you should be more careful in your movements out of doors if you do not wish your acquaintances to be known. Mr. Hunter, I believe, has the drawings which Mr. Dixon has lost, and, if so, I am certain that you have given them to him. That, you know, is theft, for which the law provides a severe penalty."

Ritter broke down completely and turned appealingly to Mr. Dixon:

"Oh sir," he pleaded, "it isn't so bad, I assure you. I was tempted, I confess, and hid the drawings; but they are still in the office, and I can give them to you—really, I can."

"Indeed?" Hewitt went on. "Then, in that case, perhaps you'd better get them at once. Just go and fetch them in—we won't trouble to observe your hiding-place. I'll only keep this door open, to be sure you don't lose your way, you know—down the stairs, for instance."

The wretched Ritter, with hanging head, slunk into the office opposite. Presently he reappeared, looking, if possible, ghastlier

than before. He looked irresolutely down the corridor, as if meditating a run for it, but Hewitt stepped toward him and motioned him back to the private room.

"You mustn't try any more of that sort of humbug," Hewitt said with increased severity. "The drawings are gone, and you have stolen them—you know that well enough. Now attend to me. If you received your deserts, Mr. Dixon would send for a policeman this moment, and have you hauled off to the jail that is your proper place. But, unfortunately, your accomplice, who calls himself Hunter—but who has other names beside that, as I happen to know—has the drawings, and it is absolutely necessary that these should be recovered. I am afraid that it will be necessary, therefore, to come to some arrangement with this scoundrel—to square him, in fact. Now, just take that pen and paper, and write to your confederate as I dictate. You know the alternative if you cause any difficulty."

Ritter reached tremblingly for the pen.

"Address him in your usual way," Hewitt proceeded. "Say this: *'There has been an alteration in the plans.'* Have you got that? *'There has been an alteration in the plans. I shall be alone here at six o'clock. Please come, without fail.'* Have you got it? Very well, sign it, and address the envelope. He must come here, and then we may arrange matters. In the meantime, you will remain in the inner office opposite."

The note was written, and Martin Hewitt, without glancing at the address, thrust it into his pocket. When Ritter was safely in the inner office, however, he drew it out and read the address. "I see," he observed, "he uses the same name, Hunter; 27, Little Carleton Street, Westminster, is the address, and there I shall go at once with the note. If the man comes here, I think you had better lock him in with Ritter, and send for a policeman—it may at least frighten him. My object is, of course, to get the man away, and then, if possible, to invade his house, in some way or another, and steal or smash his negatives, if they are there and to be found. Stay here, in any case, till I return. And don't forget to lock up those tracings."

It was about six o'clock when Hewitt returned, alone, but with a smiling face that told of good fortune at first sight.

"First, Mr. Dixon," he said, as he dropped into an easy chair in the private room, "let me ease your mind by the information that I have been most extraordinarily lucky—in fact, I think you have

no further cause for anxiety. Here are the negatives. They were not all quite dry when I—well, what?—stole them, I suppose I must say; so that they have stuck together a bit, and probably the films are damaged. But you don't mind that, I suppose?"

He laid a small parcel, wrapped in newspaper, on the table. The engineer hastily tore away the paper and took up five or six glass photographic negatives, of the half-plate size, which were damp, and stuck together by the gelatine films, in couples. He held them, one after another, up to the light of the window, and glanced through them. Then, with a great sigh of relief, he placed them on the hearth and pounded them to dust and fragments with the poker.

For a few seconds neither spoke. Then Dixon, flinging himself into a chair, said:

"Mr. Hewitt, I can't express my obligation to you. What would have happened if you had failed I prefer not to think of. But what shall we do with Ritter now? The other man hasn't been here yet, by-the-bye."

"No—the fact is, I didn't deliver the letter. The worthy gentleman saved me a world of trouble by taking himself out of the way." Hewitt laughed. "I'm afraid he has rather got himself into a mess by trying two kinds of theft at once, and you may not be sorry to hear that his attempt on your torpedo plans is likely to bring him a dose of penal servitude for something else. I'll tell you what has happened.

"Little Carton Street, Westminster, I found to be a seedy sort of place—one of those old streets that have seen much better days. A good many people seem to live in each house—they are fairly large houses, by the way—and there is quite a company of bell handles on each doorpost—all down the side, like organ stops. A barber had possession of the ground-floor front of No. 27 for trade purposes, so to him I went. 'Can you tell me,' I said, 'where in this house I can find Mr. Hunter?' He looked doubtful, so I went on: 'His friend will do, you know—I can't think of his name; foreign gentleman, dark, with a bushy beard.'

"The barber understood at once. 'Oh, that's Mirsky, I expect,' he said. 'Now I come to think of it, he has had letters addressed to Hunter once or twice—I've took 'em in. Top floor back.'

"This was good, so far. I had got at 'Mr. Hunter's' other alias. So, by way of possessing him with the idea that I knew all about him, I determined to ask for him as Mirsky, before handing over the letter addressed to him as Hunter. A little bluff of that sort is invaluable at the right time. At the top floor back I stopped at the

door and tried to open it once, but it was locked. I could hear somebody scuttling about within, as though carrying things about, and I knocked again. In a little while the door opened about a foot, and there stood Mr. Hunter—or Mirsky, as you like—the man who, in the character of a traveler in steam packing, came here twice today. He was in his shirtsleeves and cuddled something under his arm, hastily covered with a spotted pocket handkerchief.

"'I have called to see M. Mirsky,' I said, 'with a confidential letter—'

"'Oh, yas, yas,' he answered, hastily; 'I know—I know. Excuse me one minute.' And he rushed off downstairs with his parcel.

"Here was a noble chance. For a moment I thought of following him, in case there might be anything interesting in the parcel. But I had to decide in a moment, and I decided on trying the room. I slipped inside the door, and, finding the key on the inside, locked it. It was a confused sort of room, with a little iron bedstead in one corner and a sort of rough boarded enclosure in another. This I rightly conjectured to be the photographic darkroom, and made for it at once.

"There was plenty of light within when the door was left open, and I made at once for the drying rack that was fastened over the sink. There were a number of negatives in it, and I began hastily examining them one after another. In the middle of this, our friend Mirsky returned and tried the door. He rattled violently at the handle and pushed. Then he called.

"At this moment I had come upon the first of the negatives you have just smashed. The fixing and washing had evidently only lately been completed, and the negative was drying on the rack. I seized it, of course, and the others which stood by it.

"'Who are you, there, inside?' Mirsky shouted indignantly from the landing. 'Why for you go in my room like that? Open this door at once, or I call the police!'

"I took no notice. I had got the full number of negatives, one for each drawing, but I was not by any means sure that he had not taken an extra set; so I went on hunting down the rack. There were no more, so I set to work to turn out all the undeveloped plates. It was quite possible, you see, that the other set, if it existed, had not yet been developed.

"Mirsky changed his tune. After a little more banging and shouting, I could hear him kneel down and try the keyhole. I had left the key there, so that he could see nothing. But he began talking softly and rapidly through the hole in a foreign language. I did not

know it in the least, but I believe it was Russian. What had led him to believe I understood Russian I could not at the time imagine, though I have a notion now. I went on ruining his stock of plates. I found several boxes, apparently of new plates, but, as there was no means of telling whether they were really unused or were merely undeveloped, but with the chemical impress of your drawings on them, I dragged every one ruthlessly from its hiding-place and laid it out in the full glare of the sunlight—destroying it thereby, of course, whether it was unused or not.

"Mirsky left off talking, and I heard him quietly sneaking off. Perhaps his conscience was not sufficiently clear to warrant an appeal to the police, but it seemed to me rather probable at the time that that was what he was going for. So I hurried on with my work. I found three dark slides—the parts that carry the plates in the back of the camera, you know—one of them fixed in the camera itself. These I opened, and exposed the plates to ruination as before. I suppose nobody ever did so much devastation in a photographic studio in ten minutes as I managed.

"I had spoilt every plate I could find and had the developed negatives safely in my pocket, when I happened to glance at a porcelain washing-well under the sink. There was one negative in that, and I took it up. It was *not* a negative of a drawing of yours, but of a Russian twenty-rouble note!

"This *was* a discovery. The only possible reason any man could have for photographing a bank note was the manufacture of an etched plate for the production of forged copies. I was almost as pleased as I had been at the discovery of *your* negatives. He might bring the police now as soon as he liked; I could turn the tables on him completely. I began to hunt for anything else relating to this negative.

"I found an inking roller, some old pieces of blanket (used in printing from plates), and in a corner of the floor, heaped over with newspapers and rubbish, a small copying press. There was also a dish of acid, but not an etched plate or a printed note to be seen. I was looking at the press, with the negative in one hand and the inking roller in the other, when I became conscious of a shadow across the window. I looked up quickly, and there was Mirsky, hanging over from some ledge or projection to the side of the window, and staring straight at me, with a look of unmistakable terror and apprehension.

"The face vanished immediately. I had to move a table to get at the window, and by the time I had opened it, there was no sign or

sound of the rightful tenant of the room. I had no doubt now of his reason for carrying a parcel downstairs. He probably mistook me for another visitor he was expecting, and knowing he must take this visitor into his room, threw the papers and rubbish over the press, and put up his plates and papers in a bundle and secreted them somewhere downstairs, lest his occupation should be observed.

"Plainly, my duty now was to communicate with the police. So, by the help of my friend the barber downstairs, a messenger was found and a note sent over to Scotland Yard. I awaited, of course, for the arrival of the police, and occupied the interval in another look around—finding nothing important, however. When the official detective arrived he recognized at once the importance of the case. A large number of forged Russian notes had been put into circulation on the Continent lately, it seems, and it was suspected that they came from London. The Russian government have been sending urgent messages to the police here on the subject.

"Of course I said nothing about your business; but while I was talking with the Scotland Yard man a letter was left by a messenger, addressed to Mirsky. The letter will be examined, of course, by the proper authorities, but I was not a little interested to perceive that the envelope bore a Russian imperial arms above the words, 'Russian Embassy.' Now, why should Mirsky communicate with the Russian embassy? Certainly not to let the officials know that he was carrying on a very extensive and lucrative business in the manufacture of spurious Russian notes. I think it is rather more than possible that he wrote—probably before he actually got the drawings—to say that he could sell information of the highest importance, and that this letter was a reply. Further, I think it quite possible that, when I asked for him by his Russian name and spoke of 'a confidential letter,' he at once concluded that I had come from the embassy in answer to his letter. That would account for his addressing me in Russian through the keyhole; and, of course, an official from the Russian embassy would be the very last person in the world whom he would like to observe any indications of his little etching experiments. But anyhow, be that as it may," Hewitt concluded, "your drawings are safe now, and if once Mirsky is caught—and I think it likely, for a man in his shirtsleeves, with scarcely any start and perhaps no money about him, hasn't a great chance to get away—if he is caught, I say, he will probably get something handsome at St. Petersburg in the way of imprisonment, or Siberia, or what-not; so that you will be amply avenged."

"Yes, but I don't at all understand this business of the drawings even now. How in the world were they taken out of the place, and how in the world did you find it out?"

"Nothing could be simpler; and yet the plan was rather ingenious. I'll tell you exactly how the thing revealed itself to me. From your original description of the case, many people would consider that an impossibility had been performed. Nobody had gone out and nobody had come in, and yet the drawings had been taken away. But an impossibility is an impossibility after all, and as drawings don't run away of themselves, plainly somebody had taken them, unaccountable as it might seem. Now, as they were in your inner office, the only people who could have got at them beside yourself were your assistants, so that it was pretty clear that one of them, at least, had something to do with the business. You told me that Worsfold was an excellent and intelligent draftsman. Well, if such a man as that mediated treachery, he would probably be able to carry away the design in his head—at any rate, a little at a time—and would be under no necessity to run the risk of stealing a set of the drawings. But Ritter, you remarked, was an inferior sort of man, 'not particularly smart,' I think, were your words—only a mechanical sort of tracer. *He* would be unlikely to be able to carry in his head the complicated details of such designs as yours and, being in a subordinate position, and continually overlooked, he would find it impossible to make copies of the plans in the office. So that, to begin with, I thought I saw the most probable path to start on.

"When I looked around the rooms I pushed open the glass door of the barrier and left the door to the inner office ajar, in order to be able to see anything that *might* happen in any part of the place, without actually expecting any definite development. While we were talking, as it happened, our friend Mirsky (or Hunter—as you please) came into the outer office, and my attention was instantly called to him by the first thing he did. Did you notice anything peculiar yourself?"

"No, really I can't say I did. He seemed to behave much as any traveler or agent might."

"Well, what I noticed was the fact that as soon as he entered the place he put his walking stick into the umbrella stand, over there by the door, close by where he stood; a most unusual thing for a casual caller to do, before even knowing whether you were in. This made me watch him closely. I perceived, with increased interest, that the stick was exactly of the same kind and pattern as one

already standing there; also a curious thing. I kept my eyes carefully on those sticks, and was all the more interested and edified to see, when he left, that he took the *other* stick—not the one he came with—from the stand, and carried it away, leaving his own behind. I might have followed him, but I decided that more could be learnt by staying—as, in fact, proved to be the case. This, by-the-bye, is the stick he carried away with him. I took the liberty of fetching it back from Westminster, because I conceive it to be Ritter's property."

Hewitt produced the stick. It was an ordinary, thick Malacca cane, with a buckhorn handle and a silver band. Hewitt bent it across his knee, and laid it on the table.

"Yes," Dixon answered, "that is Ritter's stick. I think I have often seen it in the stand. But what in the world—"

"One moment; I'll just fetch the stick Mirsky left behind." And Hewitt stepped across the corridor.

He returned with another stick, apparently an exact facsimile of the other, and placed it by the side of the other.

"When your assistants went into the inner room, I carried this stick off for a minute or two. I knew it was not Worsfold's because there was an umbrella there with his initial on the handle. Look at this."

Martin Hewitt gave the handle a twist, and rapidly unscrewed it from the top. Then it was seen that the stick was a mere tube of very thin metal, painted to appear like a Malacca cane.

"It was plain at once that this was no Malacca cane—it wouldn't bend. Inside it I found your tracings, rolled up tightly. You can get a marvelous quantity of thin tracing paper into a small compass by tight rolling."

"And this—this was the way they were brought back!" the engineer exclaimed. "I see that, clearly. But how did they get away? That's as mysterious as ever."

"Not a bit of it. See here. Mirsky gets hold of Ritter, and they agree to get your drawings and photograph them. Ritter is to let his confederate have the drawings, and Mirsky is to bring them back as soon as possible, so that they shan't be missed for a moment. Ritter habitually carries this Malacca cane, and the cunning of Mirsky at once suggests that this tube should be made in outward facsimile. This morning, Mirsky keeps the actual stick and Ritter comes to the office with the tube. He seizes the first opportunity—probably when you were in this private room, and Worsfold was talking to you from the corridor—to get at the trac-

ings, roll them up tightly, and put them in the tube, putting the tube back into the umbrella stand. At half past twelve, or whenever it was, Mirsky turns up for the first time with the actual stick and exchanges them, just as he afterwards did when he brought the drawings back."

"Yes, but Mirsky came half an hour after they were—oh, yes, I see. What a fool I was! I was forgetting. Of course, when I first missed the tracings they were in this walking stick, safe enough, and I was tearing my hair out within arm's reach of them!"

"Precisely. And Mirsky took them away before your very eyes. I expect Ritter was in a rare funk when he found that the drawings were missed. He calculated, no doubt, on your not wanting them for the hour or two they would be out of the office."

"How lucky that it struck me to jot a pencil note on one of them! I might easily have made my note somewhere else, and then I should never have known that they had been away."

"Yes, they didn't give you any too much time to miss them. Well, I think the rest's pretty clear. I brought the tracings in here, screwed up the sham stick and put it back. You identified the tracings and found none missing, and then my course was pretty clear, though it looked difficult. I knew you would be very naturally indignant with Ritter, so, as I wanted to manage him myself, I told you nothing of what he had actually done, for fear that, in your agitated state, you might burst out with something that would spoil my game. To Ritter I pretended to know nothing of the return of the drawings or *how* they had been stolen—the only things I did know with certainty. But I *did* pretend to know all about Mirsky—or Hunter—when, as a matter of fact, I knew nothing at all, except that he probably went under more than one name. That put Ritter into my hands completely. When he found the game was up he began with a lying confession. Believing that the tracings were still in the stick and that we knew nothing of their return, he said that they had not been away, and that he would fetch them—as I had expected he would. I let him go for them alone, and when he returned, utterly broken up by the discovery that they were not there, I had him altogether at my mercy. You see, if he had known that the drawings were all the time behind your bookcase, he might have brazened it out, sworn that the drawings had been there all the time, and we could have done nothing with him. We couldn't have sufficiently frightened him by a threat of prosecution for theft, because there the things were, in your possession, to his knowledge.

"As it was, he answered the helm capitally: gave us Mirsky's

address on the envelope, and wrote the letter that was to have got him out of the way while I committed burglary, if that disgraceful expedient had not been rendered unnecessary. On the whole, the case has gone very well."

"It has gone marvelously well, thanks to yourself. But what shall I do with Ritter?"

"Here's his stick—knock him downstairs with it, if you like. I should keep the tube, if I were you, as a memento. I don't suppose the respectable Mirsky will ever call to ask for it. But I should certainly kick Ritter out of doors—or out of window, if you like—without delay."

Mirsky was caught, and after two remands at the police court was extradited on the charge of forging Russian notes. It came out that he had written to the embassy, as Hewitt had surmised, stating that he had certain valuable information to offer, and the letter which Hewitt had seen delivered was an acknowledgment, and a request for more definite particulars. This was what gave rise to the impression that Mirsky had himself informed the Russian authorities of his forgeries. His real intent was very different, but was never guessed.

"I wonder," Hewitt has once or twice observed, "whether, after all, it would not have paid the Russian authorities better on the whole if I had never investigated Mirsky's little note factory. The Dixon torpedo was worth a good many twenty-rouble notes."

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Lucy needs combination 5814 to open the safe at 2:25 to get to her stamps; Bonnie has it.

Alec needs combination 7036 to open the safe at 2:45 to get to his stock certificates; Clyde has it.

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by Carol Harper

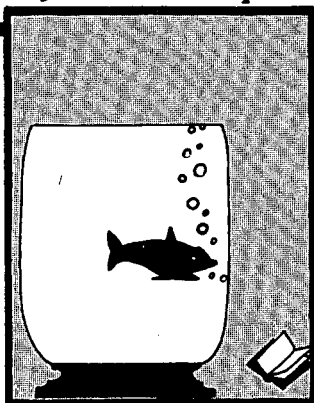


Illustration by Ivan Baryai

Martin Spurling is an American who was trained by the British to drop behind German lines and assist the French resistance during the Allied invasion of Europe. He distinguished himself in this assignment and capitalized on his success by gaining a professorship at Harvard and by writing several books on being a hero. Donald Kerwin is also a professor, in the California bay area, and served briefly with Spurling in the closing years of the war. He is an admirer of Stefan Anders, a 1980's Polish activist, as are many other American liberal intellectuals. But while Spurling is readying for a visit to Harvard by Anders, Kerwin is shotgunned to death in a convenience store near Lake Tahoe, in full view of his homicide-cop brother-in-law, Donald Gilman. When Kerwin's murderer is released because of sloppy police work and even more careless prosecution, his wife goes on a private vendetta, drawing Gilman, now on medical leave for injuries sustained in the shooting, into a search for her. Max Byrd, previously a winner of the Shamus Award from the Private Eye Writers of America for his first novel, *California Thriller*, has merged the espionage and citizen-turned-detective genres into **Target of Opportunity**. To quote Kerwin, "Everywhere else in the world, everywhere else except California, the past and the present intersect." And Byrd illustrates this point by telling his story in parallel storylines, alternating World War II and 1982, and by using his California cop in his old home town of Boston in this complex and

suspensefully plotted thriller. A book both detective and espionage fans will enjoy. (Bantam, \$17.95, 279 pp.)

If you like Loren D. Estleman's Amos Walker series, and if you are a fan of the short story, look for Estleman's **General Murders** (Houghton Mifflin, \$16.95, 232 pp.). These are ten Amos Walker stories, several of which have appeared in past issues of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, including "Greektown" which is also featured in the anthology *Alfred Hitchcock's Most Wanted*. Tightly written, each story sports a twist at the end. I especially liked "Fast Burn," about an old man who dies of cardiac arrest in Walker's office before he even has a chance to hire Walker, and "Eight Mile and Dequindre," about a murder in a coffee shop where Walker has been waiting for a client who never showed. Good reading material to carry with you for those times you find yourself trapped in a line with nothing else to do.

In **Blood Run** Leah Ruth Robinson has written a "medical suspense novel" (NAL, \$17.95, 260 pp.). And it is just that—medical and suspenseful. In this book, you follow Dr. Evelyn Sutcliffe in her private search for the reasons behind the death of a friend and colleague, Dr. Shelley Reinish. You go on rounds with new medical students; you observe an autopsy; you wander the corridors of the hospital and the morgue; and you are made privy to the gallows humor that doctors affect when confronted with death of a patient. Eventually, you begin to believe that Dr. Reinish may have been murdered—long before Ev does and certainly long before the police do. Ev does fall into the trap of confronting the individual she knows to be the killer without having arranged for back-up, a fairly amateur action. But the ending scenes make up for this small lapse in her judgment.

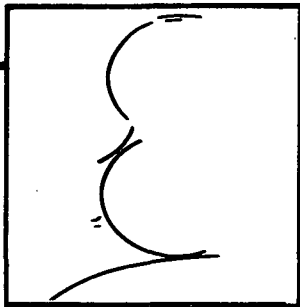
Terror directed at a jury—and at the judge, the lawyers, and the arresting officer—is the theme of Alison Drake's sequel to *Tango Key*. **Fevered** alternates the narratives of Detective Aline Scott's investigation and the victims' points of view of some particularly gruesome murders. Tango Key, Scott's beat, is not a real island in the Florida keys and perhaps that's just as well—it is hard to imagine why the tourists flock to a place with so many capital crimes of such viciousness. But the ambiance of the keys is there, and Scott, her compatriots in the Tango Key police department, her shady informants, and her lover, P.I. Ryan Kincaid, are interesting characters. If you can stomach the descriptions of the crimes, you will find the book an engrossing addition to a well-written new series. (Ballantine, \$3.95, 294 pp.)

David Everson has set **Rebound** (Ivy Books, \$3.50, 230 pp.) in the milieu of Illinois behind-the-scenes politics and intercollegiate basketball. His private eye, Robert Miles, has an interesting background himself. A former pro baseball player who really wasn't that good, he ended up retired from the game because of a dust-off pitch thrown by Don Drysdale and investigating criminal dealings in the baseball arena with former catcher and fast friend Mitch Norris. Norris is now the sole associate in Mid-Continental Op and Associate, but Miles has other help when he needs it: "Big House" Bellamy, six feet nine inches of muscle who works for B.J. Johnson and his brother Max when he isn't strong-arming for Miles; Kimball, Springfield's best cop, who just happens to be in Homicide; and Lisa LeBlanc, assistant to the Vice-President for Instruction at Lincoln Heritage University and also Miles's no-fault separated wife. Miles's baseline caseload is provided by investigations into political shady dealings for the speaker of the Illinois House, who uses the results of these investigations to control political careers. Now the speaker wants him to investigate the fast-rising basketball team at Lincoln Heritage. Of course the speaker has political motives for this not altogether altruistic look at point-shaving, illegal recruiting, payoffs, drugs, and gambling. Springfield, Illinois, is real; Lincoln Heritage University is not. But the backgrounds ring true in this gritty tale of corruption in a sports program which just happens to take place in a political town.

Peter Corris brings back his Australian private eye, Cliff Hardy, in his 1986 novel, **The Greenwich Apartments** (reprinted by Fawcett in 1988, \$3.50, 166 pp.). Hardy, in true tough private eye fashion, endures much physical abuse while investigating the mysterious shooting of a promising young movie director who was using Flat 1 in the Greenwich Apartments to store her enormous collection of video tapes. He also suffers a bit privately in his relationship with Helen Broadway, who is beginning to discover that her semi-annual vacation from her husband in the outback seems to go stale as soon as Cliff—her vacation—gets involved in a case. Does he get beaten up, shot, and otherwise damaged on purpose, or is it a subconscious means of informing his ladies that he is no longer interested? Cliff solves the case to the satisfaction of his client but, unlike his American counterparts, does not feel obliged to take the case to the ultimate culprits—he feels that that is what the victim "would have expected," and besides, as he told one of his amateur assistants, he isn't "out to clean up Sydney." Some Australian slang can slow the unaccustomed reader, but otherwise *The Greenwich Apartments* is a satisfying, straightforward read.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



The story of an innocent person wrongly accused is one used frequently by Alfred Hitchcock. In ***A Cry in the Dark***, director Fred Schepisi successfully explores this theme, using the chilling true story of a baby killed by a wild dog and a mother accused of murder.

In what is called "the most talked about case in Australian legal history," Lindy Chamberlain was found guilty of murdering her baby daughter Azaria. Although pregnant at the time, she was sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor. Her husband Michael, a Seventh Day Adventist minister whose faith was sorely tested, had his eighteen-month sentence for being an accessory to the crime suspended, enabling him to care for their two sons.

This tragic story started with a 1980 Chamberlain family

camping trip to Ayers Rock, Australia's most scenic and popular tourist spot. After putting baby Azaria to sleep in a tent, Lindy began fixing dinner. When another woman heard a baby cry, Lindy rushed to check on the child, only to see a dingo (a coyote-like dog) emerge from the tent and run off into the dark. The baby was gone. Campers mobilized, police arrived, and when an all-night search proved fruitless, the Chamberlains accepted their child's death as the will of God. But for the bereaved parents things only got worse from there.

The Australian press, known for its sensationalism, had a natural in this story and ran with it like a pack of wild dogs.

Since Lindy was the only one to see the dingo come out of the baby's tent and because the body had never been found, questions remained. The doubts

were fueled by a barrage of rumors dutifully reported on the front pages and on the evening news—the worst claiming that in the Chamberlains' religion Azaria meant "human sacrifice in the wilderness." An inquest cleared the parents of any wrongdoing, but although Michael hoped when he told reporters that "we're just a couple of ordinary Australians," the inquest would be the end of it, they were not in the clear after all. The rumor mills kept running, dingo jokes were the rage, and T-shirts with the legend "The Dingo Is Innocent" became fashionable.

A full year after the inquest, the authorities claimed to have come up with new evidence and a new investigation was ordered. The Chamberlains were charged with murdering their baby. The highly-charged trial captured the attention of all Australia.

Despite a lack of motive, the jury found the Chamberlains guilty. But the Australian public and press still could not leave the case alone. The discovery of yet more evidence—the baby's jacket, which Lindy had testified about—continued to sow doubt over the verdict. With a groundswell of public support growing, Lindy was freed from prison pending further investigation.

The Chamberlains finally

triumphed a full eight years after that horrible evening at Ayers Rock, when the Court of Criminal Appeal exonerated them of all charges. A weary Michael Chamberlain then observed, "I don't think a lot of people realize how important innocence is to innocent people."

Meryl Streep is brilliant as Lindy Chamberlain and shows here why she's been nominated for seven Academy Awards and probably an eighth. Sam Neill, a native New Zealander who starred with Streep in *Plenty*, will likely become more known among American moviegoers with continued good work such as this.



Meryl Streep stars as Lindy Chamberlain, an Australian woman charged with murdering her baby, in *A Cry in the Dark*.

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THE STORY THAT WON



The November Mysterious won by Barbara Ray of San

able mentions go to Janell dervoort, Arkansas; Pat do; Art Cosing of Fairfax, Virginia; Charles W. Ferrell of Iron City, Tennessee; Margaret Mabry of Columbus, Ohio; Ruth Carter of Fayetteville, North Carolina; Mary Gwyther Walton of Atlanta, Georgia; Michael C. McPherson of Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada; and James Huitt of Fairfax, California.

Photograph contest was Diego, California. Honor-Waldrop Watkins of Van-

Berglin of Loveland, Colora-

THE PRIZE by Barbara Ray

There. The last stone was in place. Joey brushed off his jeans and went home to supper. As he ate his cereal, Joey thought about finding the prize in the box. When he saw the miniature gun, he'd laughed. It might be good for a joke.

In geometry class the next day Miss Perkins was more sarcastic than usual; she kept Joey after school. Joey looked into her cold eyes, raised the toy gun, pulled the tiny trigger. To his surprise, Miss Perkins crumpled and fell, dead as a doornail. A heart attack, they said.

Whatever power the gun had, it worked. Officer MacDougal cited Joey for skateboarding on the sidewalk; Parkerburg lost a cop. When Grandpa wheezed, snorted, and had Joey's dog put to sleep, Grandpa slept, too. Forever.

Joey was on a roll. Mrs. Banks screamed at him for cutting across her lawn; she fell down the cellar steps, breaking her neck.

Joey's life was rapidly attaining an orderly pattern. Then Mom slapped him for tracking mud on her clean floor. (She conveniently had an allergic reaction to her headache pills.)

Joey was on top of the world. There was no way he could lose.

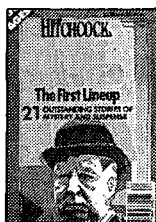
At his mom's funeral, he caught his dad watching him, not saying anything, just watching. . . .

It was so easy. A long walk in the woods, a father-son talk. The hardest part had been covering the body with stones.

Number six.

Joey wondered what new challenge would arise—for the cereal killer.

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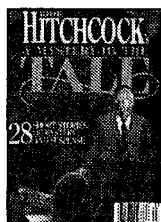
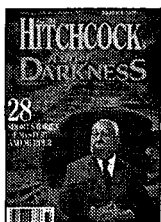
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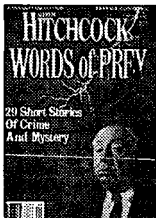
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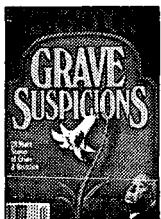


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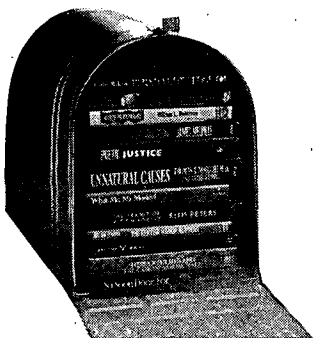
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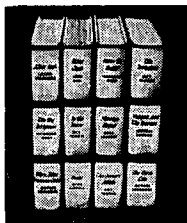
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